

LEE WOOD

DEAD LUCKY

THIS TIME THEY MIGHT CATCH HIM
— IF THEY'RE DEAD LUCKY

DEAD LUCKY

LEE WOOD

SOUND PUBLISHING

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TRENTBRIDGE TALES SERIES

Lee Wood

The Trentbridge Tales series:

Book One: MR LUCKY

Book Two: LUCKY BREAK

Book Three: DEAD LUCKY

DEAD LUCKY

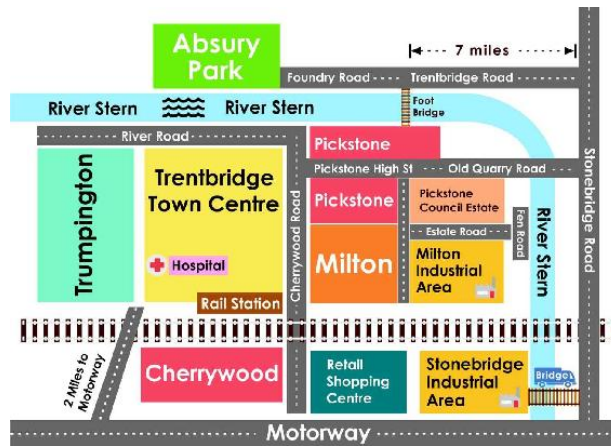
Book Three: The Trentbridge Tales series

DEAD LUCKY

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MAP OF TRENTBRIDGE



CHRISTMAS EVE

The boot of the black 4x4 opened as Kevin O'Connor flicked the dashboard switch. His two sons Tyson and Lennox walked calmly from the house they had just robbed of the three stockings full of children's toys and every Christmas present sitting under the tree. It was the fourth house they'd *hit* that night. The next day there would be a lot of kids too young to understand and left thinking they had been bad and Father Christmas was punishing them. The thought of all those disappointed children and their parents brought a smile to Kevin's face, and he chuckled to himself, "Ho ho ho."

MONKEY DUST

Michael Crompton hadn't had a lot of good luck in his nineteen-year life. His father walked out on the family when Michael was four. His mother turned to drink and by the time he was eight, she couldn't cope any longer and he was sent to a children's home only to fall under the claws of the Reverend Father Jonathan Lowbridge who loved to play with little boys in ways that made their flesh crawl and gave them nightmares for years after. By the time Michael was sixteen, he was living in a squat and within three months was addicted to heroin.

Like a lot of drug addicts in Trentbridge, over the past few weeks Michael had moved from heroin to a new and much cheaper, but just as powerful, street drug called 'monkey dust'. At £3 a hit, you don't have to steal too much to pay for your habit.

Michael had his first experience of monkey dust just six days earlier.

Five minutes earlier, he had injected himself with a shot and it made him feel invincible. He knew he could do anything. He was Superman. And to prove his superhuman strength, he decided to step out from the pavement on Town Road into the path of the twenty-ton delivery truck that was speeding towards him and stop it with his bare hands.

The medics pronounced him dead at the scene.

The last three months, the police have been swamped with over 950 reported incidents involving monkey dust. They were receiving more than ten callouts a day.

Reports say the drug produces high body temperatures in users and makes some of them feel impervious to pain and for others it can induce severe paranoia, hallucinations, hypothermia and agitation.

One of the noticeable side effects is that the drug makes users' sweat smell distinctively like prawns or vinegar.

The local newspaper ran an article after a woman out shopping on the high street had been approached by drug users and asked for money. The article quoted her as saying, 'I was walking along with my four year old son and pushing my baby in her pram when I was approached by one of these druggies who was off his face. He was shouting and begging me for money and was stumbling round. I've never been so scared.'

After the report appeared in the online edition, the newspaper received a large number of comments:

'Perhaps a simpler way to sort dealers out would be to make them take all the drugs found in their possession in a ten-minute period, after making them eat all the money found on them. If they survive, arrest them, if they don't chuck them in a skip...'

* * *

'The police do a fantastic job when they can, but their roles are constantly pre-programmed for paperwork and other stupid tasks, and when the court system and prisons release before the paperwork is done, this must be really

demoralising for the police to see these people back on the streets. Support your police, more bobbies on foot... remove the scum from the town...'

* * *

'It's costing too much in resources to deal with the illegal drugs problem and so we need a quick method of dishing out effective punishment to deter illegal drug use.'

* * *

'For users of illegal drugs, thrash their bare backsides with ¾" bamboo, so that they wouldn't dare risk a repeat.'

* * *

'Dealers of all kinds of illegal drugs, execute them.'

* * *

'They've got the right idea in Indonesia and we should learn from them.

To wannabe junkie hopefuls of the legalisation of any illegal drug, please note that tobacco, alcohol and caffeine are all legal and don't need including in the debate. Comprende?'

* * *

'The prison system is a mess. Practically privatised to security companies who under staff them for maximum profit while they overflow with inmates who seem to rule the roost. Don't blame the judges; they haven't got anywhere to put the criminals. Blame the people at the top, the government. This ongoing period of austerity is strangling public services.'

(reply to above comment):

‘Yes, British prisons are permanently several hundred places below maximum capacity. It’s why we often see cases where we scratch our heads wondering how on earth the defendant wasn’t sent down. The magistrate or judge never say we’re under instructions to only jail those we absolutely must, instead they pretend to swallow some feeble mitigation. Crime numbers are through the roof while copper numbers have been cut by 20,000. The government say “we’re skint” while this year it is gifting, yes giving away, thirteen thousand million pounds in Foreign Aid. We’re being taken for mugs.’

* * *

‘I was driving through Waterloo Road last week; it’s like a tribute to the Thriller video. It’s not like it’s one or two every so often; there’s an infestation of people who are out of their mind on God knows what. Who wants to go to Hanley for their shopping when people are out of their skulls? Yet the council talk about regeneration – top marks for sense of humour, I guess. Nostradamus predicted that the dead will rise – maybe this is what he saw.’

* * *

‘There’s no point spending police time arresting these dealers if the courts are just going to kick them straight back onto the streets.’

* * *

According to the police, there is virtually no use of this particular drug in other towns or cities. It seems the epidemic of monkey dust is restricted to Trentbridge. What little intelligence the police have been able to gather suggests one of the local drug lords has exclusive access to the ‘product’. But, as yet, who that is remains unclear.

Two paid informers came forward to reveal the name of the person they saw supplying the drug to various dealers around the local night clubs, which led police to suspect who was behind it all.

However, for the past two months the drug squad had been watching his vehicles and known associates on and off and hadn't seen anything which led them to believe he was involved. If he was, he certainly didn't appear to be using the usual method of bringing the goods in by road. Maybe he had found another method, but so far they really didn't have a clue.

KEVIN O'CONNOR

The advert in the classified section of the Trentbridge Times was exactly what Olivia Adams had been looking for. She couldn't be doing with all this new-fangled internet stuff. It probably wouldn't last anyway. No. The local newspaper was the first place she always looked.

It promised a fast and reliable service and special rates for the elderly from a well-established local family business.

Since her husband had passed away nearly four months earlier, and now into her eighties, she was finding it more and more difficult to look after the garden they had tended together for the past fifty-two years. So a company who offered tree-pruning services to the places she couldn't reach anymore was perfect.

And such a wonderful service. She had only phoned the number in the advert just that very morning, and now the tree expert and his helper arrived to make everything right.

It was her lucky day. The company had received a last-minute cancellation so they could call round to see her straight away. And Mr O'Connor seemed like such a nice gentleman. By coincidence, it seemed his elderly mother lived not far away, and she has a garden much like Olivia's, and with the same problems.

She hadn't realised she had problems before, but now they were being pointed out to her she could see them.

"As you can see, Mrs Adams, the trees have powdery mildew on them."

Funny she hadn't noticed it before he went up his ladder and examined them.

Olivia put the side of her hand just above her eyes to avoid the bright sunshine as she looked up at the figure of Mr O'Connor towering some six inches above her five feet two. His broad Irish accent reminded her of Mr Kelly, her previous neighbour who, when he lived next door, had always given her a cheery "Top of the morning to you" as he left for work.

"The best way to treat them is with an organic fungicide. Organic means it's good for the environment and doesn't harm any wildlife or birds. It's all very ethical, you see. We spray it on once a week, and after a few treatments, they should be as good as new. That will help contain things. And of course, we'll lop the trees as you requested. By the time we've finished, you'll find them much healthier. Why, I wouldn't be surprised if you don't see a lot of rare birds coming to nest in the trees, once they've been brought back to their original state."

It was a line Kevin O'Connor had told people many times. Especially when dealing with elderly people living on their own in a big house, just like the one he was standing in.

"When we've finished trimming the branches we'll take them all away, so you don't have to worry. You can leave everything in our safe hands."

After years of practice, he had it down to a fine art. If he told you bananas were pink, you'd probably believe him.

"So to do all of the work it will be £850 plus VAT. Of course, if you want to avoid paying the old VAT and all the paperwork, then we can call it £800 for cash."

Just over an hour later Kevin tapped on the back door of the house and waited until Mrs Adams appeared and invited them in.

"There you go, Mrs Adams. It's all done. We've sprayed the trees and loaded the trimmed branches into the van. Would you take a look, it's all good now."

Mrs Adams smiled with relief. "You've worked hard. I've just made a cup of tea if you would like one."

As the two workers accepted her offer and sat at the kitchen table, Olivia virtually gave them her entire life story. She could talk for England.

Olivia went upstairs to her 'secret place' where she hid her cash. She returned with the £800 and counted out the crisp twenty-pound notes into Kevin's hand £100 at a time. He, in turn, passed each lot to his son.

Tyson O'Connor was a chip off the old block. As dishonest and unfeeling as his father. Of course not all of the travelling community are

like this. Most have a heart of gold, but a few seem to have no conscience or feelings for anyone, except their own family.

Kevin knew from the creaking of the floorboards that she kept the money in her front bedroom. That could be handy to know. During her talking marathon she had told them about her daughter in Oxford and how she would be going to stay with her for a short break the following month.

When they came in from the garden, Kevin noticed the rear patio doors were wooden and had quite a large amount of rot. It wouldn't take much for them to succumb to his trusted crow bar. And the house had no side gate. They could be in and out in a few minutes.

The money could be Mrs Adams's life savings that she and her late husband scrimped and scraped to save over the years. So what?

Their motto being: Family is sacred, and anyone else can go to hell.

Kevin finished his tea. "Okay, Mrs Adams. We'll see you in a week for the next treatment."

Another sucker reeled in, he thought.

Kevin and his son walked out to the truck standing in the driveway of Mrs Adams's property.

Olivia went out to wave goodbye to them. *It's so nice to be able to deal with a friendly and honest local company*, she thought as they drove away.

Yes, she was right to use them for the work. The sign on the side of their vehicle, exactly as she had seen it in the advert. 'KC Landscaping Services'. Tree specialists. Special rates for elderly clients. Local family business. Telephone for a free no-obligation quote.

It didn't say the special rates were lower or that in every case where elderly people were involved the amounts always seemed to be over five hundred pounds. Not bad when you've done the work, got the cash and finished the job in two hours. Or less if Kevin felt he could get away with it.

As she didn't possess one of those awful computer things, she wasn't aware the website gave the company address as 172 Union Road. Anyone who looked deeper would find this address belonged to a dental practice. It was an address Kevin O'Connor used in place of his real one. Using a fake address is common practice amongst the travelling community to make people think they are a local company who can be trusted, rather than someone who would rip you off as soon as look at you. Certainly, in Trentbridge, you don't want people to know you live anywhere near Fen Road. The other way is to use the services of an accommodation address

company. It was strange how many landscaping companies listed their address as 23 King Street, the location of the local mailboxes etc. franchise.

Trading Standards had been trying to get evidence of Kevin's activities for months. However, budget cuts meant they were overloaded with cases, and the more tricky ones were put to the bottom of the pile.

And when it comes to 'tricky', Kevin O'Connor was an expert.

Like many of the people on the traveller sites along Fen Road over the past couple of years, he was gradually moving out of the tarmac business and into landscaping. Nowadays it was far more lucrative.

He was well aware people would always be willing to spend money on their houses. Especially when they got elderly they could not do the jobs themselves, so they looked round for someone to undertake the work.

All you needed was a basic website. You could find photos from other sites that showed outstanding examples of work and claim they were your own. Then simply add some fake testimonials and a fake address. If you had the knowledge, you could even include what looked like a landline phone number but was actually a link to your wife's mobile. Far better to have it sound like a secretary taking calls to an office. Older people liked that. Just like they still read the local newspaper. So a small advert in the classifieds section more than paid for itself.

Years back, before the tarmacking business, Kevin had offered his services as a builder, but the shoddy work and payments for work that was never completed was when he had first come to the attention of the local trading standards officer and eventually led to him being sentenced to three years for deception.

Luckily his crafty barrister had managed to persuade the judge his client if given this one final chance would reform and so he had walked out of court with a suspended sentence.

He had even managed to get his costs put onto legal aid. The £165,000 he'd conned from people was never recovered. And no tax was ever paid. And with a new sucker born every minute, there was no shortage of mugs he would be able to take advantage of.

ROGER MAYNARD

It was late in the day when Roger Maynard's PA, Wendy Northgate buzzed through to say he had a call from Arthur Turnball of Turnball's Transport who at the time was one of his biggest customers.

"Roger, I'll come straight to the point. I've just discovered my brother George has been syphoning off money from the business to pay for his gambling addiction. We're close to bankrupt. I won't be able to pay your invoices next week."

There was a moment's silence. "Arthur, I'm sorry to hear that, for both of our sakes. You've always been a good customer and payments have never been an issue until now. Tell me one thing. If he wasn't in the picture and if I gave you some breathing space could the business survive and pay me in the future?"

Arthur felt some of his tension reduce. "We've worked together for more than five years now, you know me. I can honestly tell you, with him gone, the business could survive but MacDonald's who we use for some of our welding work say they won't wait and have put our account on hold. They won't do any more repairs until we pay them and I can't do that until I sort out this mess."

Roger thought for a moment. "What if I offer to do the repairs in place of MacDonald's? You know we have the equipment to do it."

"You'd trust me and undertake that repair work as well? If that's the case, we could get over this and get back on track."

"Arthur, the only proviso would be George is no longer associated with your business. I'd need to be assured of that and have it in writing."

“I’ll get on to the lawyers first thing in the morning and have them send you the paperwork. Roger, I can’t thank you enough.”

Four months later, Turnball’s won a massive contract with one of the major supermarket chains. It doubled the size of their business, and despite MacDonald’s going back to them and offering lower prices, Arthur Turnball repaid Roger’s loyalty and help by keeping all their repair business with Trentbridge Engineering. It was a contract that grew five-fold over the years, and the two men had become close friends.

Two years later, MacDonald’s went into receivership, and Roger was able to purchase some of their equipment and plant for a fraction of its value.

Another ‘stroke of luck’ came about because the four-acre site the Trentbridge Engineering occupied happened to be directly behind the depot of Felix Marks Containers Ltd. In fact, the property of the two companies backed onto each other.

This became handy when their depot needed containers repaired quickly. And they *always* needed the work done quickly. So who better to use than Trentbridge Engineering who specialised in container repairs and were just a stone’s throw from your back door.

Over its twenty-four-year history, Roger Maynard’s business Trentbridge Engineering had expanded beyond recognition. What had started in a rented commercial unit on the edge of town had grown into a purpose-built award-winning freehold building set on its own a four-acre site.

After leaving school at fifteen, he had been offered an apprenticeship at a local engineering business, over time Roger had gained the skills and become an outstanding engineer with a lot of diplomas to hang on the wall.

When the company he worked for was bought out by a large multi-national, he found the friendly atmosphere started to change, and not for the better. Finally, one day after being told what to do by a so-called management fast tracker with no knowledge of engineering, Roger decided enough was enough and when the company offered some of the workers a redundancy package he put his name forward.

With eight years behind him, the package wasn’t a fortune, but his parents had taught him to be cautious with his savings. With the redundancy package it was enough to get his new business off the ground. His old company in their wisdom decided to sell off some of the machinery the

previous management spent a fortune on. Roger had been lucky and managed to purchase it for a song. He had even arranged a deal so the company would deliver and install it into his new unit.

The struggle of those early years and the various fights with the bank to borrow a few thousand pounds when customers were slow in paying were thankfully a distant memory. The business was now extremely cash rich and had grown by specialising in the maintenance of shipping containers. Perhaps it had been a question of being in the right place at the right time, but Roger felt it was more than that.

One of the turning points came when he'd been running his business for ten years. They had moved to a new four-acre site, which Roger managed to buy the freehold to for a knockdown price during the recession. At that time, things were going well. He was making a decent living, and the company employed four people. The work was coming in, and a couple of large contracts kept things on track.

In the fourteen years since then the business, had expanded beyond recognition. It employed nearly sixty people and Roger made sure everyone who worked in his company were well paid, and enjoyed the benefits of private healthcare and a subsidised canteen. The company even had a small crèche. And no so-called management fast trackers telling his highly experienced engineers how to do their job.

Roger liked to think he set a good example. He gave to charity, was a regular blood donor and involved in helping out with several local community projects. He kept himself fit at the gym. He'd liked to have become a vegetarian but couldn't quite manage it so ate as little meat as possible.

The success of the business meant in 2006, Roger had been able to purchase a beautiful five-bedroom luxury detached house with almost an acre of garden at 36 Fieldview Lane in Cherrywood, the swankiest part of town. It cost £295,000. With the added extension and improvements he made, it was valued close to £850,000.

The day they moved in, their only child, Julie, was nine and the new neighbourhood meant she attended a new school. It was there she met Sarah Parks whose father was a solicitor with his own practice.

The two girls hit it off right away and had remained best friends ever since. In turn, the parents of both girls gradually became friends.

But Roger had his faults.

A year after Wendy Northgate become his PA, the pair were working late one night to finish a contract bid that need to be finalised. Wendy lent across Roger's desk facing him. As he looked up he couldn't help but notice the top two buttons of her blouse were undone and her exquisite cleavage was on display. She caught him peeking and in a sexy voice he'd never heard her use before, said, "They're very sensitive to a man's touch."

Two minutes later, all the paperwork had been scattered and she was lying across his desk, the pair frantically going at it like rabbits.

Wendy loved to talk dirty. During their affair, it was the thing that turned him on. She would walk into his office and say things like "I want you to fuck my brains out" or "I'm not wearing any knickers today."

The affair lasted for two years until Wendy found a boyfriend and she and Roger agreed it was for the best to end things.

The only other time was three years later, when Wendy had been married for just over a year and her husband was eight days into a two-week training course in Canada for his new job. Just before it was time to go home for the day, Wendy walked into Roger's office and said in the sexy voice he remembered so well, "Steve's not back for another five days and I'm bloody gagging for it." Roger couldn't resist.

Since then, over the past seven years, it had returned to a normal boss and PA relationship.

Despite his liaison with Wendy, it hurt him when his wife was unfaithful and moved out to live with someone else. Roger's young daughter decided to stay with her dad, and that was the turning point that made him realise he spent too much time working and not enough time with his family. He loved his wife. The fling with Wendy had just been about sex.

Maybe his wife wouldn't have gone off if he had spent more time at home. But he was trying to secure their financial future during a time of recession where it was touch and go if his business would survive. Luckily his hard work had paid off, and now it was highly successful. Nowadays, most of his customers were large well-established companies and needed the services he offered more than he needed them.

KEVIN O'CONNOR

The headline of the Trentbridge Times read '**Schoolteacher in Car Park Coma Attack Dies**'.

When he saw it, Kevin O'Connor knew it meant trouble.

The incident happened outside the Five Bells pub nearly three months earlier. Kevin had hit the man over the head from behind with an iron bar.

He hadn't meant to hit him so hard. And the brutal kicking he and his two sons, Lennox and Tyson, had given the man as he lay unconscious on the ground didn't help matters.

For a while, it seemed the man would regain consciousness and make a recovery of sorts, but recently he had taken a turn for the worse, and now he was dead.

There was a witness sitting in his car who had seen the entire event and called the ambulance and police but had then driven off. However, the police had tracked him down through the 999 call he made and he gave a statement describing the three assailants. Detective Inspector Eden Gold who had been heading up the enquiry interviewed Kevin at the time but as the victim had looked set to recover and there was only one witness prepared to come forward, the Crown Prosecution Service had decided there wasn't enough to be certain of a conviction in court.

However, even in the current flawed justice system murder was seen as a top priority case and the police now upgraded it to a murder enquiry. They would come back to question Kevin again as they had done at the time of the incident. The extra resources required in such a case would be made available in the hope of obtaining a conviction.

Maybe it was a good time to go back to Ireland for a few months until things had blown over? Although he and his family had lived in Trentbridge for the past twelve years, he still had property back home.

The last thing he needed was the police sniffing around again. He had a large drug shipment due in shortly, and was aware from his contact inside the local police station the drug squad looked into his affairs from time to time but so far he had managed to keep two steps ahead of them. He had laid false trails so they would use up their resources and budget concentrating on the low-hanging fruit. But with everything going on, the pressure was beginning to mount.

Most days he was his normal self. Nothing seemed to worry him, and if anyone got in his way, he simply took care of them.

For the first time in years he argued with his wife Sadie, and was aware his intake of alcohol had increased considerably, but he had always been able to handle it in the past and was sure once the pressure was off things would go back to normal.

Most of the time he was a laid-back sort of character but not a man to cross if you knew what was good for you.

JULIE MAYNARD – SATURDAY 7 JULY

As she woke up and opened her bright blue eyes, Julie Maynard knew this was going to be a day to remember. For once she was sober on a Saturday morning. She held back the previous night because this was the special day she had been looking forward to for weeks. She was saving the hangover for after that night. When she went to sleep the previous night, she was twenty years old. That morning she was twenty-one, and the main reason for her smile was at seven o'clock that night *the* place to be in Trentbridge was going to be 36 Fieldview Lane in Cherrywood.

Her lovely wonderful daddy had spared no expense for his princess. It had taken a lot of planning. But now everything was ready. Invitations had gone out to sixty guests inviting them to an outrageous and over the top fancy dress party. The caterers and entertainment had been booked. The local wine merchants thought it was Christmas and New Year all wrapped into one.

Julie was certain none of her friends would forget Saturday the seventh of July.

She yawned as she stretched her arms above her head. She walked over to the large south-facing window and flung open the curtains, letting the bright rays of sunshine burst into her room.

It was her dad's house. Since he and Julie's mum Francis had separated he lived alone, apart from his only spoilt daughter.

Six years earlier, her mum had got tired of him working long hours and had found refuge in the arms of another man. At first, it was because someone had noticed her, but as time had gone on, they had fallen in love,

and she had made the decision to move out. Now Julie's mum lived a few streets away on Welham Park with her long-term boyfriend.

It affected Julie at the time and she had gone a little off the rails. However, her dad had cut down on his work and spent more time with her. Thankfully all of that mess was behind her. Now she had her whole life ahead of her.

As she stepped into the shower, the party was all she could think about. It would be a night of pure celebration. All of Julie's family and friends would be there. Dad had hinted he'd bought her something special. For the past week at breakfast, he had teased her, showing her two gift-wrapped boxes. One was about six inches by four inches. The other was flat and slightly larger than the size of an A4 sheet of paper. Julie had an idea the small box contained the keys to the bright red Audi TT car she hinted she wanted when they had visited the car showroom a few weeks earlier. And she was her daddy's girl and usually got her way.

She had no idea what the other gift was. Dad was beaming about it but giving her no hints or clues. She would just have to wait and see.

Two years earlier, Julie started working for her father in his engineering business. She was the office junior, learning the trade from Wendy Northgate who had worked for Julie's dad for the past eleven years.

Although Wendy was thirty-nine, she remembered what it was like to be twenty and cut Julie a fair amount of slack, especially when she arrived at work late, after a night of excess alcohol and clubbing. But she didn't take any crap, even if Julie was the boss's daughter.

The two women got on well. Wendy was extremely good at her job and ran the office like a well-oiled machine. Julie, on the days she wasn't suffering from a hangover, was learning a lot from her. But she lived for her free time when she could let her hair down.

Young free and single and with blonde hair, five feet six, a slim body, a good figure and long legs meant Julie was extremely popular with the opposite sex. And she liked to party – hard. A typical night would be having her best friend Sarah come round at about seven o'clock, listening to music, opening a bottle of wine, followed by a glass or three of Baileys. Then taking a taxi into the town centre and hitting their favourite bar. Then walking across town from club to club in short skirts and high heels whatever the weather or temperature. It was what all the girls did.

She hadn't had a long-term regular boyfriend since Craig Dawson. He was from a council estate on the other side of Trentbridge. They met when she was fifteen and she was rebelling against everything. He was eighteen. He had taken her virginity two days after she turned sixteen. Over the next two years, they had been an item. She thought she loved him, even though he treated her like shit. She couldn't imagine a time when they wouldn't be together. She could forgive him everything even the occasional slap or punch when he was drunk or angry. After all, the next day he would be full of remorse.

Then one night as they had fallen asleep in his bed, the police had called and taken him away. It appeared he liked taking cars that didn't belong to him. It was his fifth offence, and was sentenced to two years in prison. Attending court, Julie suddenly found herself confronting two other girls who also claimed to be his girlfriend.

The whole affair had made Julie realise men couldn't be trusted.

When Craig was released from prison after serving ten months, he called at the house to see Julie. When she told him she had moved on and she didn't want to see him anymore, and he should do the same, he started to stalk her. He would stand outside the house and watch for her light to come on as she went to bed. If she looked out of the window in the middle of the night, he would be standing there. He bombarded her with up to twenty texts or calls a day, slashed the tyres on her dad's car and damaged the bodywork; killed the family cat and left it on her front doorstep. The police cautioned him on several occasions, but he just kept coming back. After nearly five months, just as it seemed to be getting worse, he was arrested for his involvement in a car-ringing operation and was jailed for six years.

It took Julie a while to get over the stalking incident but eventually she managed to put the events behind her, and nowadays she was having too much fun for a steady boyfriend. Going out with a few friends for a meal at Nando's was one of her favourite things. Or staying at home and trying out newly purchased make-up with Sarah.

On a night out, if Julie happened to attract the attention of someone she fancied, then there was the possibility of spending the night with him with no ties in the morning.

She was certainly in no hurry to settle down. Her dad employed a cleaner and housekeeper, so living at home was fine. Why wouldn't it be

with her laundry done and all the household chores taken care of? Why on earth would she want to find a man and settle down with noisy smelly kids? There would be plenty of time for that when she was older. Life was for living.

SARAH PARKS

Over the years, Julie and Sarah's boyfriends, pets and hairstyles had come and gone, but their friendship remained as strong as ever.

When the pair went out for the night and were on the hunt for some company, they called themselves the dynamic duo. For men who preferred blondes, there was Julie. For lovers of redheads, there was Sarah.

They'd shared most things. One night they had even shared the same man. Leroy Jennings was twenty-eight, big black and beautiful. He'd boasted he could take them both and several drinks later he kept that promise. It was the only time the two had kissed each other passionately. They had certainly learned a lot from him. After Leroy, other men had a lot to live up to.

Part of Julie's hinting to her dad about an Audi TT car for her birthday was because Sarah's dad had given her a car on her twenty-first just four months earlier. Her birthday present had been a lovely brand new VW Golf in white. Just what she had asked him for. Good old Dad.

That night, after the party, Sarah would sleep over at Julie's house, something she did often. They would talk into the night about all sorts of important things they probably wouldn't remember the following day.

Sarah worked for Ridgewells estate agents. It was a job she really enjoyed. Showing prospects round the top of the market houses the company dealt in and getting ideas for the time when she was ready to set up in a place of her own.

In three weeks' time, the two girls were going on a ten-day holiday to Ibiza. If the previous year was anything to go by, it would be ten nights of sand, sun and sex. When the money had run out after a week, they had

worked in one of the bars for a couple of nights. The wages were poor, but the other girls soon taught them how to rip off the punters for a few euros a time.

You could get away with all sorts of things because it would all be left behind when you went home. To make some extra money one night after a few too many drinks Sarah had even gone down on her knees for the bar owner after he offered her a quick 100 euros. *Not bad for five minutes work*, she thought.

Sarah loved dancing and the atmosphere of a nightclub. Having ‘fun while you’re young’ is what it was all about.

Maybe it was because her parents were still happily married, so unlike Julie, Sarah had thought about the time when she would meet someone and settle down. It might be a few years off, but she liked to daydream about having a family – one day.

FANCY DRESS – SATURDAY 7 JULY

The first few days of July had been the sunniest days of the year so far. Julie had spent the day at Sarah's house. Most of the morning they had been spent watching their favourite YouTube make-up channel, trying on clothes and talking about the party.

The pair had arranged to collect their costumes for the party from the fancy dress shop in Pickstone, the ones they had picked out and ordered from the shop's website two weeks previously.

It was twenty past five when Sarah managed to find a parking space just off the high street. They knew the shop closed at 6 p.m, so they had plenty of time.

All dolled up in their summer dresses, designer shoes and Ray-Bans they looked a million dollars. Men were certainly turning their heads as the two strolled arm in arm down the high street on their way back to Sarah's car. It was the car her dad had given her on her twenty-first birthday in March, so there was every reason to think Julie would get the keys to her car that night.

Walking along and giggling, the two girls stepped up to the crossing. The white car approaching from their right slowed to let them cross. The lorry driver, as he approached from the opposite direction, also slowed.

Before stepping out, they checked both ways, and then started walking, still chatting and giggling about the costumes and the party.

As the driver of the 4x4 behind the white car saw it slow down, he decided he couldn't wait and drove round it, picking up speed as he did. The girls chatted away and failed to notice as the big black vehicle swung

out from behind the now-stationary white car onto the wrong side of the road.

Talking on his mobile, Kevin O'Connor was holding in his left hand and being a little worse for the six pints and whisky chasers consumed at the pub he had just left, he failed to notice the two girls.

He also failed to see the delivery truck approaching the crossing from the other way.

At thirty-nine miles an hour, hard metal meeting human flesh and bones is no contest. The 4x4 came off best. Hitting a large truck is more of an equal match, and the journey of Kevin's vehicle ended with its bonnet embedded in the front of the truck.

The driver of the 4x4 was saved by the air bag as it was deployed. The two girls didn't fair so well. The impact threw them into the vehicle windscreen and then across the road. The pair were dead before their blood-soaked bodies came to rest on the pavement.

Kevin O'Connor might have been drunk but his instinct clicked in, and he took out the handkerchief he kept in his trousers pocket and wiped the air bag where his face had landed, in an attempt to remove any DNA. He then proceeded to wipe the steering wheel, turned the ignition off and removed the key. He had the foresight to retrieve the mobile he'd dropped on the moment of impact. It had fallen into the footwell. He opened the driver door, stepped out and walked round to the back of the vehicle.

Most of the people who witnessed the incident were looking at the two girls as they lay on the pavement, lifeless and covered in blood. They were being attended to by a man in a white tunic with the words Lloyds Chemists. Bernard Lloyd dashed out after seeing one of the girls flung against the window of his pharmacy.

Kevin O'Connor walked past all the onlookers and kept walking. No one challenged him, and within a minute, he turned the corner into Lonsdale Road. He briefly looked around to see if anyone was following but didn't notice anyone.

As he walked away, he dialled a number from his mobile.

It took the ambulance four minutes to arrive. Bernard Lloyd had already covered both girls in blankets. The medics put the girls into the ambulance. It was obvious nothing could be done.

As the paramedics closed the rear doors, a police car turned up. PC Frank Edwards spoke to the medics and then got on his radio. He then went

to the boot of his vehicle and got out a roll of police 'Do Not Cross' tape and proceeded to place it around the areas where the girls had fallen.

The other officer, PC Pauline Underwood, after checking inside the Ford Kuga 4x4, walked over to the truck. The driver seemed to be okay other than confused by what had happened.

"Where's the driver of the 4x4?" PC Edwards asked.

"I don't know," the truck driver replied. "He went round the back of his vehicle. I haven't seen him since."

PC Edwards walked over to his colleague. "I think the driver has done a runner. Let's try to get a description and get it out and see if anyone can locate him. He can't have gone too far."

PC Underwood had already requested a PNC check on the vehicle, giving its registration to the control room. It came back as having been stolen in Birmingham two weeks previously.

Pauline went to all the witnesses, asking if anyone had seen the driver of the 4x4.

One person, recalled a lot of detail. He told the police officer the man he saw getting out of the 4x4 was about fifty, five feet eight with greasy black hair, wearing blue jeans, white Nike trainers, a Manchester United t-shirt, and had a small scar under his left eye.

Will Gleeson always remembered detail. The training courses he had attended as part of his job as a security guard had taught him to be observant – to remember the small details – which was how he'd noticed the scar. Things like that came in handy, especially to pick out the troublemakers when he was on duty for his second job as a part-time security man at local football matches.

He added, "I remember him because he pushed past me after I saw him getting out of the vehicle. He had almost hit me when he swerved before hitting the two girls. I won't forget him in a hurry."

Pauline thanked Will Gleeson for his detailed description and got on her radio and gave the information so the details could be circulated.

BAD NEWS

In the ambulance, the phone in her purse rang and went to voicemail.

“Julie darling, it’s dad. Where are you? Everyone’s waiting to sing happy birthday to the birthday girl. See you soon. Love you.”

It was 7.10 p.m., and the bright sunshine that had been out all day was continuing to shine.

The large lounge of 36 Fieldview Lane in Cherrywood was full of helium balloons, all set in bunches of pink and red and complimented by an abundance of signs saying ‘Happy 21st Birthday’.

In the centre of the room was a large table heaped with buffet food. A unit on the main wall displayed a massive selection of horse jumping trophies Julie had won. They held pride of place. Every available shelf space was adorned with birthday cards. On a table specially set up in the corner next to the front windows were heaps of presents, all gift wrapped in bright colours. Sitting on top of the pile of presents were two gift-wrapped boxes, one about six inches by four inches. The other was slightly larger than A4 and slim. One contained the keys to the Audi TT his daughter was getting for her twenty-first birthday. The other contained the keys to something else. A big surprise that Julie had no idea was coming.

Music was playing softly in the background, and people were standing around chatting and laughing, most of them with a glass in their hand. Many had wandered out through the French doors and into the vast back garden with its freshly manicured lawn.

Wherever you looked, there were people in all sorts of fancy dress. A Roman soldier, Batman, Superman, Captain America, one lady dressed as a

Japanese geisha, a skinny man who decided to dress up as The Hulk, and even a caveman complete with a plastic club.

Julie's mother was in the kitchen dressed in everyday clothing as she took a tray of mini sausage rolls out of the oven. Her costume of Lady Penelope from Thunderbirds was laid out upstairs, ready for when she had finished cooking.

The front doorbell rang. Roger Maynard, dressed in a thirties American gangster suit, walked through from the lounge and opened the door with a beaming smile, his left hand holding a flute glass half filled with champagne. More guests were arriving to add to the fifty already enjoying the food and drink!

"My, that's an authentic looking costume," he said as he was confronted by a female police officer standing there with a man in his mid-thirties wearing a smart suit.

Roger smiled at the plain-clothed man. "Don't tell me; they lost your costume?"

"Hello, sir. Sorry to disturb you. We're looking to speak with Mr Maynard."

Roger had a sudden sense of unease. "Yes. I'm Roger Maynard. How can I help?"

The plain clothed man flashed his police ID badge. "I'm Detective Inspector Eden Gold. We're not guests here for the party I can see is going on. I'm afraid this is for real, sir. We are genuine police officers. I'm sorry to inform you that we've got some bad news, may we come in?"

Brief flashes went through Roger's mind. *Has the factory had a fire, has there been a break in?*

He beckoned them through to the kitchen just as his ex-wife who was dressed as Lady Penelope from The Thunderbirds was taking a batch of sausage rolls out of the oven and placing them onto a large plate.

Francis Maynard looked up to see the three figures entering the room. She continued to arrange the food as Roger closed the door.

"This is my ex-wife Francis," he told the two newcomers.

"I see, sir."

He turned to Francis. "Are you Julie's mother?"

Francis nodded. "Is something wrong?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so. There's no easy way to say this. There's been an accident involving Julie. A hit and run in Pickstone high street. I'm very

sorry; the medics did what they could.” He said this to help ease the pain of his next sentence. “But there was nothing they could do. I’m afraid your daughter died at the scene.”

Detective Inspector Gold knew from experience the best thing was to wait and say nothing, to allow the news to sink in, as he knew it would.

Francis clutched Roger’s arm and looked as if she would collapse. Roger felt as if the world had stopped.

“That can’t be right, it’s her 21st birthday party.”

“I’m very sorry, but it is definitely Julie.

We found her credit cards and a receipt from the fancy dress shop it appears she had just been to. The receipt had her name and this address.”

“What about her friend Sarah. Is she alright?”

“I’m sorry to say both girls were involved and Sarah didn’t make it either. A colleague of mine is on his way over to her house as we speak.”

“Sarah’s parents aren’t at home. They’re both here. Today is Julie’s twenty-first birthday. That’s what the party is for. Julie and Sarah are best friends.”

Francis collapsed into a chair and started to sob. PC Pauline Underwood had already put on the kettle and went to comfort her.

DI Eden Gold continued. “If Sarah’s parents are here, I need to have a word with Sarah’s parents. Is there somewhere quiet I can talk with them?”

“Yes, of course, let me take you through to my library. It’ll be quiet in there. I’ll ask them to come through. I obviously won’t tell them why.”

As the two men walked into the hall, the DI spoke. “If you don’t mind me saying so, sir, you’re taking this extremely calmly.”

“I think I have to. I quickly realised the brevity of what you told us and I need to be strong, at least on the outside for everyone’s sake. Believe me, inside my heart, is breaking. Julie is our only child. But I can’t let it show, not yet.”

Roger Maynard went out to the garden and found Sarah’s parents and asked if they would come through to his library. They both thought it was to show them a surprise. Sadly, the surprise he would introduce them to was not the kind they were expecting or would enjoy.

As Roger walked back into the kitchen, he found his ex-wife collapsed on the floor. Pauline Underwood had already rung for an ambulance and was attending to Francis as best she could under the circumstances.

After checking there was nothing he could do to help, Roger Maynard excused himself. He told PC Underwood he needed to make an announcement to the guests.

After asking everyone to move from the house and into the back garden, Roger stood on the porch with DI Gold standing by his side. With the tears finally flowing, Roger told the stunned crowd what had happened.

As the guests made their way to leave, one by one they offered their condolences to Roger. A couple of his close friends asked if there was anything they could do to help. Roger thanked them but told them not at the moment.

Once the house was cleared, Roger returned to the kitchen. His wife was still crying and being comforted by Pauline.

He walked to the library and found Sarah's parents holding each other and crying. The DI had walked over to the window at the back of the room to give them some space.

Roger walked over to the DI. "Everyone's gone. Perhaps it's best if we leave them for a couple of minutes."

Once they reached the lounge, Roger asked Eden, "Can you tell me what happened?"

"According to what I've been told they were crossing the road when a 4x4 vehicle overtook the car in front on the wrong side. The first car had stopped to let them use the crossing, and the 4x4 drove round and hit them. If it helps, they almost certainly died instantly and didn't suffer or even know about it. I know it's of small consolation, but it may help you and your wife to know that."

"Yes, thank you. However, unless you need anything further from us, I think we'd probably want to be alone now."

The ambulance arrived and after examining Francis Maynard, the paramedics had asked for the name of her doctor and suggested he should attend.

Sarah's parents walked out of the library said a few words and left to go home and comfort each other as best they could.

Ten minutes later, the family doctor arrived and prescribed some powerful sleeping tablets for Francis. After she had taken two, Roger took her upstairs to the bedroom they had once shared, closed the curtains and helped his ex-wife into the bed to rest.

After checking she had dozed off, he went downstairs into his library and wept like a baby. The tears flooding down his face as the anger rose up.

His beautiful daughter Julie, the apple of his eye. From the day she was born, she had been his world. For all his life, he had always seen the positive side. Even when the odds had been stacked against him when he struggled to start and build his business. All the set-backs he had come up against. Nothing had got in his way. His wife and only daughter were what spurred him on to succeed where others would have given up. He prayed this was just a nightmare and that he would wake up and find everything as it should be, but he knew the truth. His entire world had just been shattered. For the first time in his life, the black gloom of depression outweighed the light of hope.

HIT AND RUN AFTERMATH

The police circulated a description of the suspected hit and run driver.

PC Zara Thornton was on patrol with her colleague PC Howard Mitchell when they spotted someone fitting the description just as they noticed the person getting into the passenger side of a Black BMW X5 that had pulled up. The vehicle then sped away. PC Thornton followed as the BMW exceeded the speed limit. It seemed to be heading for Fen Road, and both officers knew what that meant.

PC Mitchell got on his radio. "I need a PNC check on a Black BMW X5. Registration number VU62 LOX."

The vehicle was turning into Water Street, which half a mile down would lead into Fen Road, the area notorious for travellers and where the police never usually entered unless there were a minimum of four officers.

This close to the sites it was probably not a good idea to stop the vehicle, so the officers decided to follow it.

A message came through on PC Mitchell's radio.

"The vehicle check you requested comes up as Kevin O'Connor, with the address of the Two Oaks Caravan Park, Fen Road. The file is flagged as 'proceed with caution'."

The PC acknowledged the message and told his control they were following the vehicle and requested back up.

Word about the connection to the traveller site reached the incident room set up to investigate the hit and run. DCI Diana Wakefield was the woman in charge.

She instructed DS Carla Parsons to contact the council and get a copy of the CCTV footage for the last twenty-four hours from the camera that

overlooked the entrance to the site.

The camera had been installed when the local council spent nearly a million pounds upgrading the road and area leading to the site. There had been a long-running battle with the caravan park residents who claimed the cameras breached their human rights. The council replied that every council estate and the town centre is covered by cameras and this should be no exception.

A poll in the Trentbridge Times newspaper regarding their installation had shown 91% of the people who answered were in favour of the cameras remaining and the council stuck by their guns.

The police control room had been in touch with DCI Wakefield to let her know the latest on the citing of the suspect and about the vehicle that had picked him up and its destination.

She contacted the police officers and informed them to stay just outside the site and await the arrival of DI Eden Gold and DS Tracy Archer who DCI Wakefield was sending to try to interview the suspect.

Twenty minutes later, two marked and one unmarked police cars slowly entered the private road that led to the Two Oaks caravan site on the left. However, the O'Connor residence was a large detached house on the right-hand side.

The front door was at the top of eight wide steps with white Roman-style pillars each side and an impressive arch above. There were two bay windows on each side and on the left was a conservatory. It was easily larger than the size of most houses. Every inch of the property looked immaculate.

Parked on the right were two vehicles: the BMW X5 the two police officers had seen pick up the suspect and a Range Rover Vogue with the latest model number plate.

DI Eden Gold and DS Tracy Archer walked up to the sixth step and knocked on the door of the large mobile home. The police officers had been told to remain in their cars.

The door was opened by Mrs O'Connor. "What do you want?"

"Hello, Mrs O'Connor. We'd like a word with your husband."

She folded her arms. "He's not here."

"I suspect he is. I can come back with extra men and turn the place over, but neither of us wants that, do we? So how about you let us in and we speak with him."

A voice came from inside. "Let them in, Sadie."

The detectives climbed the two final steps and were careful to wipe their feet on the mat.

"That's not enough. Take your shoes off," said Sadie. It wasn't a request.

The interior was immaculate. Family photos were much in evidence and little in the way of clutter.

Kevin O'Connor indicated the sofa where the two detectives could sit. "What can I do for you?" came the terse reply.

"We'd like to ask you a few questions about your whereabouts earlier today."

"I've been here all day. Ask the wife."

"That's funny because we have a report and eye witness that places you on Pickstone High Street at around 5.20 this afternoon."

"The witness description fits you: five foot eight tall with greasy black hair, blue jeans, white Nike trainers, a Manchester United t-shirt and a small scar under the left eye."

"Naw. I told you. I've been here all day. Never moved."

"Do you own a Ford Kuga 4x4 registration number VU62 LOX?"

"No. A BMW. You can't miss it. Parked right outside."

"Okay, Mr O'Connor. As I said, we have an eye witness to the incident. We'll need you to accompany us to the police station."

"Not me. The football's on the telly. I'm going nowhere."

"At the moment I'm simply asking you to accompany us. But if you prefer I can arrest you. Then we'll need to send in the boys with big boots to turn over every inch of the place. Who knows what we'll find hidden away. By the way. You haven't asked what all this is about. You're not curious? Most people would be."

"Not me. Keep myself to myself."

"So what's it to be Mr O'Connor? Will you come for a friendly chat or do I send in the boys with size eleven boots to trample over everything and upset your wife."

The DI walked out of the house with Kevin O'Connor and over to the nearest police car.

He spoke to the uniformed police officers. "Thanks for the back-up. We're on our way now. No need for you to hang around."

WILL GLEESON – WITNESS

Back on Pickstone High Street, the ambulance had taken away the two young hit and run victims to the mortuary, and the police forensic team had moved in.

The police had cordoned off the road, and the four members of the forensics team were carefully going over every inch of the 4x4 vehicle, taking samples and checking every surface for clues to help identify the driver.

Two police officers were going from shop to shop, checking to see if there were any CCTV recordings covering where the incident had taken place or the possibility they might help identify the driver leaving the scene.

Unfortunately, budget cuts meant the council CCTV system that covered the high street in Pickstone had been under repair for the past three weeks, and no footage was available.

The forensics team spent time examining the 4x4 as much as they could. Then it was arranged for a vehicle recovery truck to load the 4x4 and cover it, under supervision of a member of the forensics team and take it to the police examination garage where forensics could spend more time going over the vehicle millimetre by millimetre in the hope of finding DNA, fingerprints or fibres to prove who was driving at the time of the fatal incident.

Kevin O'Connor was taken to the police station for questioning. He was asked to surrender the clothes he was wearing and also asked to attend an

identity parade at Trentbridge police station and had been picked out immediately by the witness Will Gleeson.

Kevin was arrested and charged with Death by Dangerous Driving. He was let out on bail to appear at the magistrate's court to decide where the case would be heard.

His lawyer would try to have the case heard in a magistrates court where the penalties were lower. However, the prosecution was pushing for the matter to be held at Crown Court.

At the initial hearing, the magistrate felt the matter was grave enough it should be heard by the Crown Court. A date was set for Monday the 1st of October.

With the witness statement and all the evidence building up, the prosecution was confident of a conviction.

WILL GLEESON – MONEY PROBLEMS

Will Gleeson had been watching the evening news. One of the main stories was about his bank, the TSB. It appeared the bank, in its wisdom, had decided to change its IT system and it had all gone wrong.

He listened as the reporter outside the bank's HQ went over the story:

“It has been several weeks since the IT switchover that has caused a crisis at the bank.

But there still appear to be online payment problems for frustrated TSB customers.

Some current account customers and some business clients are still facing problems making internet or app payments. The bank said experts from computing giant IBM, called in during the first week of the fiasco, would remain ‘for as long as it takes’ to fix the errors. It has not estimated how long it will be until services return to normal.

The ongoing problems come in a week when some customers have reported fraudsters emptying their accounts. In addition, some customers who have switched away from the bank have reported receiving letters suggesting they have died.

According to a spokesperson for the bank it is ‘working around the clock’ to fix the problems.

Social media has gone crazy with people saying they are worried over payments when they have tried to move money or draw out cash from a hole in the wall. The bank has even closed a lot of its high street branches.”

So when he received an urgent call from his bank, Will wasn't surprised. They informed him that someone had tried to access his account and take out money. Thankfully it had been caught in time by the bank's security system. They just needed to check a few security questions. The young lady asked for his mother's maiden name and for the first and third number of his pin number.

"Sorry, my system's being a bit slow. As you may be aware, we had a large IT crash earlier, but everything is under control now. Yes. It's back. I apologise I didn't quite get those last details. Can I have the second and last numbers of your pin? Yes, that's fine, Mr Gleeson. Everything is secure now. No need to worry. Thank you for your understanding."

Will put down his mobile. Unscrupulous people were obviously taking advantage of the situation. It was lucky the bank had caught things in time.

He could have lost the £6,000 it had taken him nearly a year to save by working overtime when it was available and an extra part-time job as a member of the security team at the local football club. It was a job he enjoyed although he wasn't particularly a big football fan, but he liked the challenges of the work. The money was to buy a second-hand car for his son, who lived with his mother.

Will promised he would buy him one if he did well at his exams. Buying a decent car would cost £5,000, and because his son was a young driver, the insurance would be an extra £1,000.

Will identified Kevin O'Connor from the police identity parade as being the man he recalled seeing as the driver of the Black Ford Kuga 4x4 who had knocked down and killed the two young girls on Pickstone High Street just a few days earlier.

He gave the police a full statement and with no previous convictions or as far as the police could find no blemishes to his character, he would be an outstanding witness for them. The fact he told them about the training course the football club had sent him on, and his eye for detail only added to his credibility and the police were confident of getting a guilty verdict.

The mood at Trentbridge police station was high. They had been after Kevin O'Connor for years, but he had always managed to elude them. The only time he had ended up in court was when the local Trading Standards office had managed to prove he had undertaken shoddy building work and ripped off elderly pensioners for tens of thousands of pounds.

* * *

Will Gleeson was having a bad day. A very bad day. It was 9 p.m. and he was just about to leave work and head for the off licence and buy himself a large bottle of whiskey.

He was locking the back door of the factory where he worked as a security guard, to walk over to his car, when he was suddenly approached by two men.

“Hello, Mr Gleeson. We’ve come to talk to you about the witness statement you gave to the police recently.”

Initially, for a few brief seconds, Will thought they were police officers. But having the chance to look them up and down he realised they were both too young to be plain-clothed officers. Their appearance seemed more likely to be of the criminal fraternity. He noticed the tattoos and designer clothes.

The older man moved close and growled, “We want you to forget what you saw. Tell them you’ve had second thoughts and can’t be sure. Tell them you can’t be certain it was the right man you picked out.”

“I’ll do no such thing.”

“Things could get really nasty if you stick to your story. You know what I’m saying. We may have come to visit you at your place of work, but we know where you live and wouldn’t want to see any harm come to you, like your house burning down.”

“Listen, you piece of shit. I’m not scared of you and threats won’t deter me from giving evidence. If you really want me to forget, then it’s going to cost you. I need six grand, take it or leave it. Come back with the cash, and I’ll have a sudden memory loss, but your threats will only help my memory. Got it?”

What Will Gleeson was telling them obviously threw the two men. They backed away and as they did, all the younger one could say was, “We’ll be back.”

Will Gleeson didn’t really want to go back on his statement, but recent events had put him in a bad situation. The previous day his TSB bank account had been hacked after he received a phone call from a young lady who told him she was from their fraud prevention department.

Then that morning when he went to pay for petrol on his way to work, his debit card was declined. He found out his bank account had been emptied and the entire balance of six thousand two hundred and eighty-two pounds had been taken, leaving him twenty-seven pence in credit.

He had been on the phone to them for over an hour trying to find out what had happened. But his bank had refused to reimburse him as they said he

had given out his pin number and other details. He then phoned the police but they had told him there was nothing they could do. So they were not exactly his favourite people.

He replayed the phone call in his mind. The female fraudster had been very good. He'd given her the first and third numbers of his pin. Then she had told him there had been a hiccup. "Sorry, my systems being a bit slow. We had a large IT failure earlier, but everything is under control now. Yes. It's back. I apologise I didn't quite get those last details. Can you give me the second and last numbers of your pin?"

Of course. By doing that she'd tricked him into revealing all four numbers and with that information they had drained his account, leaving him penniless and the bank was now saying it was '*all his fault*'.

He had given his statement of the accident because it was the right thing to do. But having suffered at the hands of criminals and then been told by the police that nothing could be done had played on his mind. So why should he do them a favour when they weren't prepared to do anything to help him?

He worked bloody hard for that money. And if he didn't get it back he would have to let down his son who was due to get his exam results the following month and on the back of good results was expecting a car.

Will had been on social media and it seemed lots of people were in the same boat. Their accounts had been hacked and the bank was saying it was nothing to do with them. Lots of posts on Facebook were saying the bank's initials TSB stood for Totally Shit Bank.

This opportunity held a chance of getting his money back and be able to keep his promise to his son. All he had to do was hold his nerve and pretend he wasn't frightened by the threats, although inside he was petrified.

He lived alone. His wife had left fourteen months earlier after he came home early one day not feeling well at work and found her 'moaning her head off' in their bed with one of her work colleagues.

The guy was big, over six feet tall, with muscles on his muscles; otherwise Will would have hit him. Reporting their activities to the company they worked for and telling the man's wife had at least given Will *some* satisfaction.

It appears they had run off to Bournemouth together. Good riddance. The only thing Will missed was his son.

Will drove home, thinking of the best way to proceed.

After putting a frozen curry in the oven, he sat down at the kitchen table.

As he sat deep in thought, the oven timer went off, and the strong flavours of his packet curry for one filled his nostrils. His 900-calorie meal was ready.

Now all he had to do was wait to see if the men came back with his money.

CROWN COURT TRIAL – DAY ONE

The first day of the trial was taken up by all the formal legalities involved in such a case.

The local press had sent a reporter and photographer to cover the event, and they took up position outside the court to interview people and take photographs of everyone they could.

Kevin O'Connor arrived surrounded by family and friends, shielding him from the photographer as much as they could.

Inside the court an official read out the charges before her honour Judge Nicola Hargreaves:

1. That on the 7th of July 2018 at Pickstone High Street you drove a vehicle in such a manner as to cause the deaths of two people, namely Julie Ann Maynard and Sarah Rose Parks.

2. That on the same date you left the scene of the accident, which is an offence under Section 170 of the Road Traffic Act 1988.

After the charges had been read out, Kevin O'Connor entered his plea on both counts: "Not Guilty."

The prosecution barrister stood up to address the court and the jury.

"Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Sebastian Cooper. I am the barrister for the prosecution and it is my job to show you the facts and the evidence that will prove beyond reasonable doubt it was, in fact, Mr Kevin O'Connor

who was driving the Ford Kuga 4x4 on July 7th. He alone was the person responsible for the death of two young girls who were crossing the road when the defendant overtook a car that had stopped in front of him. And that, while on his phone, Mr O'Connor plowed into the two young women while driving at excessive speed and killed them instantly.

"You will hear from a most reliable witness that after the incident Kevin O'Connor calmly and deliberately got out of his vehicle and walked away from the scene.

"You will hear evidence that Mr O'Connor, the man in the dock, didn't even bother to check and see if the two people he had just run over were alive or dead.

"You will hear how, from a nearby road, he phoned a family member to come and collect him.

"And how he was seen getting into the passenger side of a vehicle that was subsequently followed by a police car and found parked at his home.

"You will be able to view CCTV footage from a camera covering the entrance to the area where Mr O'Connor lives that shows the vehicle involved left there at 2.13 p.m.

"You will hear from the phone company that his mobile gave out a signal placing him in the area at the time of the crash.

"And you will learn how he lied to the police about his whereabouts, claiming he was at home all day when in fact he was not.

"Finally, when two police officers visited his home less than an hour after the accident, he was seen wearing the same clothes as the witness described."

The defence barrister Ursula Quinn took to the floor. "As my first witness, I would like to call my client Mr Kevin O'Connor. Now, Mr O'Connor, I would remind you that you are under oath, do you understand?"

"Yes, I do. I take swearing on the bible very seriously."

"Fine. Now perhaps you can answer some questions for the jury to help them understand things clearly. First of all, the prosecution has told us you were driving the vehicle on that day. Can you tell us why they might have thought that?"

"I'm not sure, but this is not the first time I have been mistaken for someone else. Two of my friends have told me in the past they saw me in

Trentbridge when I was away on business in Birmingham. It seems there is a man who bears a striking resemblance to me. In fact, my doctor sent a letter to the police saying he has met the man and can confirm he looks like me.”

“Now, there is a witness who says they saw you getting into the passenger seat of a vehicle on Lonsdale Road.”

“Yes. That was me. I had gone out for a walk, and I tripped over and hurt my foot. So I phoned my wife to come and collect me, but I was walking towards the high street, not away from it.”

“Is that why the phone company say your phone was operating in the area at that time.”

“Yes. I assume it is. I understand the technology is not 100% so it cannot cover a location with pinpoint accuracy.”

“Why did you say you had been home all day?”

“Because I’m a traveller. The police are always hounding us, saying we are responsible for everything. I’m not like that. I run my own business, working six days a week to support my family. I don’t rely on state handouts. I’ve worked every day of my life since I was fourteen. A few of my kind give us all a bad name, but I’m not like them, the same way, not every Muslim is a terrorist. Romany gipsies are an ethnic minority and subject to the same prejudice as black people, through no fault of our own.”

“So what you are telling the jury is that you were not on Pickstone High Street at the time of this accident. That you were not the driver of the 4x4.”

“That’s right. It wasn’t me.”

“And what about the witness who states they saw you on the day?”

“As far as I am aware, the only place they have seen me is at the police station in a line-up. I don’t believe the other people stood out as much as me. They weren’t wearing the same clothes. I happened to be wearing a Manchester United t-shirt, and none of the other people in the line-up had one. I think that influenced the witness against me. I just know it wasn’t me.”

“Thank you, Mr O’Connor.”

When the selection had been made to approve the members of the jury, Ursula Quinn and her defence team had deliberately chosen people from ethnic minorities, including two Muslims, when the jury selection process had taken place and she had ‘prepped’ Kevin in the words to use to help win these jurors over.

THE PROSECUTION WITNESS

Finally, it was time for the prosecution to bring in their most powerful evidence. Their main witness, Will Gleeson.

Sebastian Cooper got to his feet. “I call William Gleeson to the stand. Now, Mr Gleeson, can you tell us about the events of the afternoon of July seventh.”

“Yes. I was out shopping on Pickstone High Street. I had just been to the shoe shop, and I was going to the newsagents to buy a magazine. As I walked along, I saw a white car stop at the crossing, and two girls begin to cross. As they did, a Ford Kuga 4x4 drove round the white car and knocked down the two girls. They were both flung across the road onto the pavement. The 4x4 then crashed into a lorry coming towards me on the other side of the road.”

“Yes. It must have been a big shock. What happened next?”

“Everyone was crowded round the two girls, and the lady driving the white car just sat in her vehicle. I think she was too traumatised to move. The lorry driver got out. He seemed to be okay. The driver of the 4x4 got out and walked away. I didn’t see where he went.”

“I believe you got a good look at him and later gave that description to the first police officer on the scene.”

“I gave a basic description of a man I saw. I assumed at the time that he was the driver. Looking back, I didn’t actually see him getting out of the vehicle.”

“Eh, but you were there. You said in your statement he was the driver. You described him in detail.”

“I thought at the time he was. And then the police called me in for an identity parade. I pointed out the man I thought I saw but having had time to think about it I’m not sure he was the man who got out of the 4x4. I saw someone looking like him there as I describe. He could have been someone just passing by, and I got confused. Also with the time I’ve had to think about the incident, I remember I had seen the gentleman the previous week. You see I have an extra part-time job as a security guard, and I was working at a local charity football match, and he needed assistance as he fell over and hurt his foot. I think I had to go and get medical assistance for him. So I’m not sure if that clouded my judgement when I saw him in the line-up at the police station later. I think he was probably wearing the same clothes as the previous week and so I picked him out when with hindsight I probably wasn’t one hundred per cent sure. I’m extremely sorry if I’ve caused a problem, but it wasn’t my intention.”

Roger Maynard and his ex-wife had been watching from the public gallery. The police had assured Roger and Francis the witness was reliable and certain of his facts. It didn’t seem that way now.

Ursula Quinn stood up to cross-examine the witness.

“Mr Gleeson. Obviously it was a very traumatic day for you. There you are walking to a shop when suddenly this horrific scene takes place right in front of you. No warning, just a couple of seconds to react. I imagine had it been me I would have been horrified and just glued to the spot unable to move. You clearly saw the man you described at the time, but I need you to think very hard. A man’s liberty is at stake. Can you be absolutely certain the man you describe was the driver of the 4x4 Ford Kuga that caused the accident and knocked down those two unfortunate girls or do you think with hindsight you picked him out because you recalled seeing him the previous week at the charity football match as you describe? What I’m asking is, can you be certain the man standing before you is actually the same man you told the police you witnessed getting out of the vehicle?”

The twelve members of the jury seemed to all be waiting with baited breath as Will Gleeson appeared to be searching his mind for the answer.

Finally, after what seemed like minutes, he answered. “No. I cannot be one hundred per cent sure he was the driver.”

It took the jury less than four hours before they were led back into the court.

“Foreman of the jury, have you reached a decision?”

“We have, your honour.”

“Do you find the defendant guilty or not guilty?”

“NOT guilty.”

The courtroom erupted, with Kevin O’Connor’s family and friends hooting and hollering from the public gallery.

The judge called for silence, and finally, the court was brought to order.

“Kevin O’Connor. The jury have found you not guilty. You are free to go.”

Roger drove Francis back to the house she now shared with her partner. Roger still had the packet of powerful sleeping tablets the doctors had left on the evening of their daughter’s death.

As he left the house, Roger handed them over to his ex-wife.

* * *

It had been three days since the jury had found Kevin O’Connor not guilty. Roger Maynard was still trying to come to terms with the verdict. All the things he had worked so hard to obtain didn’t seem important anymore.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door.

“Hello, Mr Maynard. We’ve come to say sorry we let you down in court.”

“Please come in.”

The caller was Detective Chief Inspector Eden Gold along with his partner DS Tracy Archer.

For the next ten minutes, they discussed the situation and what had gone wrong in court.

He didn't say it directly, but the officer gave Roger the impression the witness had either been scared off or paid off. It was almost certainly the deciding factor in the jury's decision.

"We will be keeping an eye on the witness. It may be they'll want to shut him up permanently, or at least make sure he stays scared, so he doesn't change his mind."

As Roger showed the two detectives to the door, Eden turned and shook his hand.

"Once again, I'm so sorry we let you down."

Roger went through to the kitchen and put on the kettle.

With the cup of tea he had just made, Roger sat down in his favourite armchair and picked up a copy of the local newspaper to take his mind off everything. However, the headline he saw on the front page was a story that made his blood boil.

TAKEN OFF THE DRIVEWAY

The headline on the front page of the Trentbridge Times read '**Police powerless after stolen caravan found on Fen Road**'. The article told how an elderly couple in their late sixties, having spent over thirty-six years working in the NHS, had found their caravan worth £30,000 stolen from their front driveway. Two weeks later, the police had found a traveller family living in it.

Due to an oversight, it appeared the elderly couple didn't have the caravan insured when it was taken.

When the police interviewed them about it, the travellers claimed they had bought the vehicle from a man in a pub, and they produced a handwritten note simply saying 'Received £3,000 cash for Swift Challenger 590 Caravan'. And with a rough signature of 'J. Murphy' at the bottom.

One of them was claiming that he was using the caravan as his home. It was parked in the grounds between the Two Oaks Caravan Park and the house owned by Kevin O'Connor. And the traveller was his son Lennox.

Mr & Mrs Bannister, who could prove the caravan belonged to them thought now it had been found the police would seize it and return it to them. However, they were in for a nasty shock. The police had told them they had 'no lawful powers' to take it back.

They told the couple their only option was to begin expensive and time-consuming civil proceedings. But if the current occupant decided to move or sell the vehicle, then there was little hope of ever seeing it again.

'The police had informed the Bannisters that it would breach the travellers' human rights and that they would have to be rehoused before it

could be seized. Even though it was on land attached to where the family lived in a five bedroomed house.

Mr Bannister was quoted as telling the reporter, “We spent all our retirement money on that caravan because we thought it would last us a lifetime. We’re devastated. It seems as though no one cares about *our* human rights.”

As he read the newspaper report, Roger couldn’t believe what he was reading.

At the end of the article in a small box, it gave the name Ian Young, local crime reporter and an email address of ‘ianyoung@trentbridgetimes.co.uk’.

Roger decided he would like to help Mr and Mrs Bannister but before he did he needed to get more facts on the situation. So he sent an email to the reporter telling him who he was and giving a vague idea of what he wanted to discuss and asking if they could meet. He received a reply within the hour and Ian said he was happy to meet and suggested the following day and asked where and when.

The next day, Roger drove into town to keep his appointment with the reporter. Roger had invited him to lunch at the Pagoda restaurant at 1 p.m.

After introductions were over and soft drinks had been ordered Roger asked Ian if he would be kind enough to give him the real facts on the story. He wanted to know was it true that the police seemed powerless to stop this sort of thing from happening.

Over the next hour, Roger Maynard sat stunned as Ian told him in strict confidence all about Kevin O’Connor and his family and what they got up to. None of it could ever be printed because the police didn’t have the resources, or it seemed the will, to look into matters more deeply. And without evidence the police couldn’t act and the Trentbridge Times were unable to print anything for fear of being sued.

ANONYMOUS THREATS

Besides the story that had been printed in the Trentbridge Times, the reporter told Roger about the other activities the O'Connor family was suspected of being involved with.

"Look, Mr Maynard, the guy who did this job before me warned me about them. He and his family were threatened after he tried to expose them. He found a new job in Leicester to get away from them. I'm not married, and my family live miles away, and I've only been the reporter for two months, but in that time I've received a couple of anonymous threats that I know they were behind, but of course, I cannot prove anything.

"There is circumstantial evidence the family control a network of criminal activity. We believe they are behind the theft of priceless artefacts from museums and they use intimidation and actual violence to get vulnerable men to undertake back-breaking work for them. These men are held prisoner in sheds at the back of some land behind the Two Oaks Caravan Park, but nobody seems to know who owns the land. They are forced to work long hours and undertake heavy manual labour for little or no money. There is also evidence Kevin O'Connor gets these men to claim benefits and then takes the money for himself. They are never allowed outside of the compound unless supervised by O'Connor or a member of his gang so the men can't alert the authorities or tell anyone about their mistreatment. The work is hard and dirty with no protective clothing or eye goggles provided. They have to go round collecting scrap metal, clean or repair tools and car engines. The men are treated like dogs."

Ian then went on to tell Roger that he was working on a story about O'Connor's wife; a lady called Sadie who it appeared was running a puppy

farm and advertising home-bred healthy puppies. Four people came forward to say they were unfortunate customers who had bought the puppies from her and were left counting a terrible cost. They had paid her up to £600 for Labrador puppies, but the animals had fallen ill, with one dying from highly contagious parvovirus.

The newspaper was looking into the whole episode of Sadie who was intent on putting profit over animal welfare. A vet the newspaper had spoken to told them that the puppies were being removed from their mother far too early because it was easier to sell them before they stopped being cute.

The reporter also mentioned how the only time Kevin had been convicted was when Trading Standards took him to court over shoddy building work and conning elderly people for work that hadn't been undertaken. How he and his family members would drive them to their bank and get them to withdraw thousands of pounds in cash.

According to a source Ian had spoken to, rumour had it the police also believed the family were behind a lot of other criminal activity, but the police didn't seem willing to do anything about it. They seemed genuinely afraid of the family.

There were rumours Kevin was the person responsible for a new synthetic illegal drug called Monkey dust. Also known as MDPV or Bath Salts.

"We are seeing more and more reports of people harming themselves after taking the drug. You may have seen one or two articles we've already run and I'm sure you will be reading a lot more about it over the coming weeks. It leads to hallucinations, much like LSD and causes severe paranoia. For other users, it turns them into a zombie-like state. It also seems to give people superhuman strength. They lose all sense of pain. They think they are Superman. We are running a story this week of a guy who jumped off the roof of a house and landed on a car then just got up and walked away as if nothing had happened. An anonymous source of mine says the O'Connors are behind it. He tells me Tyson is selling it to dealers as he goes round the clubs."

Roger told Ian. "I can't believe the police are powerless to do something about these people. I've been looking into them to find information I could pass on to the police, to try to get some sort of justice for my daughter, but it all takes so much time. Before my daughter's death, I had planned a few

days away on a cruise starting next week, but I might cancel it and look deeper into the O'Connors. Surely someone has to stand up to them."

Before the two men parted, Ian gave Roger a last piece of advice.

"I'm sorry for what happened to your daughter, but I must advise you not to get involved with these people. They are unscrupulous, with a total disregard for the law. If you do decide to get try to uncover their activities, watch your back and tread carefully or who knows what might happen. And don't expect much help from the police."

OUT OF COURT

In his mind, Roger kept going over the time spent sitting in the courtroom during the trial. He had seen just how cold the man in the dock had been. And he had witnessed first hand the members of the man's family sitting around him in the public gallery. The things he had overheard them say. The threats they had made to the people who came forward to give evidence. And then there was the matter of the main witness who had changed his story so that Kevin O'Connor, with the help of his clever lawyer, had been able to walk free from the court.

And when he had been in the corridor waiting outside the courtroom, Roger had overheard a couple of the police officers talking about the O'Connors and how the police had been after them for years but could never find enough evidence to convict them. So it seems they had always managed to stay one step ahead of them. His lawyer had confirmed that the O'Connor family were 'people of interest' to the police but they seemed to operate outside of the law.

And he remembered one or two of the remarks the two detectives had made during their recent visit.

They believed the witness had either been paid off or more likely, threatened, to change his story. The things they had told him about how they would like to do more but sadly lacked the resources.

The more Roger thought about everything that had happened the more determined he was to try to get some justice for his daughter.

He was confident he could change that. As a relatively wealthy man, he had all the resources it would take. He could discover what Kevin O'Connor's illegal activities were, gather the evidence against him and present it to the police so they could convict him. It might not be for causing the death of his daughter and her best friend, but it would represent some sort of justice. And besides, with his daughter gone, what else did he have to occupy his mind?

Trentbridge Engineering could run without Roger at the helm. The four divisions each had strong leadership and his PA could handle all the day-to-day matters. Two years ago, when he had gone on a trip to the US and Australia the business had run without him for the two months he was away. In fact, he was proud that many of his team had introduced new systems into the business. So he was in no doubt they could cope while he was spending time looking into the affairs of the O'Connor family.

But he would have to be careful. He was about to go up against a family who would stop at nothing to get their own way. From things he had overheard the police officers in court discussing, he wondered how many more people the man had killed in the past. And how many more would suffer in the future at the hands of the unscrupulous family?

Roger had seen the police were virtually powerless to stop Kevin. If he was going to do better, then he needed to do things the police were unable or unwilling to do. But keep within the law.

He had spent a lot of time working on a plan, and now he was ready to carry it out. Whatever the risks.

* * *

The clock on the dashboard displayed 6.02 a.m. Roger pressed the remote and the garage door opened to allow his Range Rover to emerge. He set the satnav for Fen Road, an area of Trentbridge he knew mainly by reputation and had only visited on one occasion that he could recall. Twenty-four years earlier, when he was first starting his engineering business and was looking for cheap premises he had looked at a unit on a small industrial estate there, but it didn't have the three-phase electricity supply he needed, and so he opted for a small start-up unit on the Milton Industrial Estate.

With virtually no traffic to contend with, it took just fifteen minutes before the satnav showed Roger was close to reaching his destination. The Range Rover turned onto Fen Road, and he drove along at fifteen miles an hour to take in the surroundings. He knew he would be able to review everything later thanks to the front and rear HD-quality dash cams attached to his vehicle. He could view everything using the BlackVue app on his phone, which he could then download and watch on his computer.

He drove to the end of the road, passing the various caravan parks and small commercial estates that were spread the length of the road. At various points, he could see the River Stern that sometimes ran close to the road and at other points disappeared behind the houses or structures that made up that side of the road.

Fen Road was a no through road that came to an end when it reached the blocked-off entrance to Manor Farm. As he turned around and drove slowly back the way he had come, he noticed across on the neighbouring Pickstone Council estate a handful of 'To Let' boards, with the names of various

estate agents, one of which was on a board opposite the Two Oaks Caravan Park. He recalled in one of the newspaper stories reporting the trial it had mentioned that Kevin O'Connor lived in a large house next to the Two Oaks caravan site. The newspaper had even shown a photograph of the property, together with a photo of Kevin which had been taken as he entered the court.

Roger made a note of the estate agent's details and then drove out of Fen Road and around to the council estate to view the property. After checking out the house from the front, he walked down the side alleyway and came to the back garden. From there he had a view of Kevin O'Connor's house. It looked like the view from one of the upstairs rooms would be far better but he would need to check that when he came back with the estate agent and had a tour of the inside of the house. He would phone them later and make an appointment.

After pouring the milk onto his muesli, Roger sat down at the kitchen table, opened his laptop and typed in the estate agents website address. It didn't take long to find the details of the house. It was on a six-month let while the owners were working abroad. Allowing them a few minutes to settle in and grab a coffee, he called the estate agents at 9.05 a.m., the lady he spoke to arranged to meet him at 39 Cheney Way at midday.

It turned out to be a fully furnished three-bedroomed house, and after the tour and confirming the back bedroom would give him a good view so he could track the comings and goings from the O'Connor residence, he agreed to rent the property for the six-month period, telling the lady it was for one of his employees.

They agreed to meet at her office at 2 p.m., and sort out all the paperwork. He could collect a set of keys so '*his employee*' could move in without

delay.

After sorting out the paperwork, Roger set off to his next appointment. He had seen a small second-hand van being advertised on the local buy and sell website at a small garage.

The silver VW Transporter on offer was in good condition and previously owned by a company which he presumed had gone bankrupt. It still had their name sign written on the side: Ravendale Couriers.

The garage said they could remove the signs and deliver the van within a couple of days. Roger told them he needed the van quickly and he could arrange for the signwriting to be removed. He said he would buy the vehicle if they could deliver it later that day to his engineering business address and hand the keys over at reception. He arranged a bank-to-bank money transfer for the £3,000 asking price and phoned his secretary Wendy, for her to arrange the insurance and tax of the vehicle.

UNDERCOVER

Having the vehicle would allow Roger to drive round and people would think he was making deliveries.

No one would take much notice of a courier vehicle and might expect to see them darting about from one place to another. It would enable Roger to get a sense of what Kevin O'Connor was up to.

Roger could hardly ask the police what information they had on Kevin O'Connor or what to expect from the man, so it would take a lot of time and work to build up the information Roger needed. The sooner he started the better.

That night, he would stay in his own house and get an early start. Then, the following evening he would move into his *new* home at Cheney Way.

When he left the house at six the next morning, it was too early for the local bakers to be open, so Roger made a stop at the Shell garage that was open twenty-four hours and picked up a couple of sandwiches and soft drinks. It could be the evening before he had a chance to get something to eat.

Just after 6.30 a.m., Roger parked his van on Fen Road, close to the Two Oaks Caravan Park and with a view of the O'Connors' driveway so he could see any vehicle coming or going.

For the next hour, he watched as various vehicles passed by from the various caravan sites, most of them Transit-size vehicles with company logos for trades such as tarmacing, landscaping and gardening services.

At 7.30 he saw a Transit van drive out of Kevin O'Connor's driveway. On the side of the van, he saw the name 'KC Landscaping Services'. The van drove off, and Roger followed at a discreet distance. The vehicle drove across town to the more affluent area of Cherrywood where Roger's house was. Finally, he saw the vehicle stop outside a house on Luard Road. These were very sought-after houses close to the town centre and Fenner's Cricket Ground. It was obvious Kevin was there to undertake or quote for landscaping work.

Roger watched and after ten minutes, saw Kevin and his son Tyson emerge from the house and unlock the ladder attached to the roof of the Transit van and go back to the house.

An hour and a half later the two men re-emerged. They had what looked like three bags full of tree branches cut into pieces and then proceeded to put the ladder back on the roof. Roger watched as an old lady came out of the front door and handed Kevin an envelope, which he opened and seemed to be counting. He couldn't see the note denominations, but it looked to be a fair amount of money, especially if it was for less than the two hours they had been there.

Roger followed the Transit out to a country lane where it suddenly stopped in a layby. As Roger pulled in to a farm drive to avoid being seen, he watched as Kevin and Tyson unloaded the three bags of tree cuttings into a ditch, obviously to avoid having to take it to the local council tip and paying the fee they charge for commercial users.

The Transit moved off, and Roger followed them again. On two occasions, due to traffic, he nearly lost them and on one of these occasions had to jump an amber traffic light. He knew he couldn't continue to follow them in this way.

The next house they stopped at was in the area of Trumpington, and once again it was a reasonably large detached house. The same thing happened with the ladder being unlocked and less than two hours later, the two men emerging from the house. This time all Roger saw was Kevin stuffing a brown envelope into his back pocket as he walked to the driver's side of the Transit.

Roger managed to follow without losing them as they headed back to Fen Road. He parked up in the same place he had occupied first thing that morning.

An hour later, Roger noticed a large black 4x4 BMW coming out of the O'Connor driveway. Once again he followed the vehicle, keeping a discreet distance until it indicated and turned into the car park of the Lion and Lamb pub. Roger drove past the pub, turned his van around and parked in a layby twenty yards from the pub car park entrance. It had proven to be a blessing as he had been desperate to take a leak for the past hour.

It was nearly 2 p.m., and Roger unwrapped the second sandwich and can of Coke. The next day, he would come better prepared with a flask of coffee he would make before leaving his new home.

It was close to three hours before Kevin drove out of the pub car park. He turned right, heading back the way he had come. Once again, Roger followed at a discreet distance. The 4x4 seemed to be wandering from side to side like the driver was drunk. Roger didn't know how much Kevin had had to drink, but he thought you wouldn't spend three hours in a pub and only sip one pint.

From what he had learned of the O'Connor family, they liked their drink. This had been the reason his daughter had been killed. In court, they said the police officers visited Kevin's home after the accident and taken him to the police station where he was given a drink-drive alcohol test, and it had been positive. Even after the elapsed time, he was still three times over the limit. If something wasn't done to stop him, it was only a matter of time before he did the same to someone else. Another incident involving the son or daughter of some other unfortunate family.

Roger spent the time wisely, sitting in the layby opposite the Lion and Lamb. He used his phone to search eBay for covert vehicle tracking devices and found a listing for 'Covert Magnetic GPS Tracker TK104'. The company listed them at £85 each and the sales blurb said 'The 104-Pro is supplied ready to use out of the box and once powered, it will automatically start reporting its location and speed along with many other useful parameters to our cloud tracking software GPSTLive'.

So rather than try to follow the Transit or any of Kevin's other vehicles and risk being seen if he could manage to attach one of the devices to the vehicles he could follow at a much greater distance to avoid being noticed.

He ordered three of the devices. That way, given a chance he could attach them to the different vehicles Kevin used. He'd seen the Transit and the 4x4 but from the court case it seemed the vehicle Kevin had been driving on the day he hit Julie and Sarah was a vehicle not registered in Kevin's name. It had been stolen in Birmingham a few days earlier.

During his online search, Roger also purchased what the website described as a Travel Contenance Aid. In other words a plastic bottle with an attachment he could use to pee in to.

After following Kevin back to Fen Road, Roger drove the short distance to his new address. He just needed to find a local shop to buy some fresh milk and bread.

TRACKING

The next morning, with only a short distance to travel, Roger arrived and parked up on Fen Road as he had done the previous morning.

To be on the safe side, he arrived at 6.30 a.m. Based on the previous day, he expected the Transit to leave at around 7.30. However, at 8.20 there was still no movement of any vehicles. He needed to have a better view of what was happening inside. That would be tricky, but Google maps had shown the house backed on to the River Stern, and there was a public footpath that ran past the back of the house.

Roger decided if no one was going to leave, it was worth having a look around the back. Maybe there was a chance to set up a surveillance camera so he could learn more about the activities of Kevin O'Connor.

One thing was certain. Taking on this man and his family was not going to be easy. It certainly wasn't like the movies where you have a computer wizard who can hack into systems and traffic cameras and follow suspects across town. This was going to be far more complex and time-consuming. But nothing was going to put Roger off. He was going to find evidence of this man's illegal activities and present a watertight case to the police so they could take him to court.

The only thing Roger had going for him was the fact he was a wealthy man. He could afford it and was prepared to spend whatever it took to destroy this evil family before they hurt someone else.

The pathway from Fen Road down to the river was about fifty yards along from Kevin's house. As Roger got to the end of the path and proceeded to walk towards the house, he noticed what looked like Kevin unloading boxes from a canal boat that, from what he could see, was

moored directly behind the property. Rather than risk being recognised, Roger turned left and walked in the opposite direction. About 400 yards further on was a bridge. It might have been a good idea to get a better view from the other side of the river, especially as there were open fields over that side and behind the path on that side was a raised bank. That would give Roger a better chance of seeing what Kevin was up to.

Roger walked over the bridge and stood behind one of the grey metal pillars so he could observe what was happening without being seen. He wondered what Kevin was up to. Roger was fairly certain it couldn't be legal the way they were skulking round. He wondered what was in the boxes.

He watched as Kevin and two extremely scruffy men unloaded the boxes and take them through a gate in the high metal fence that stands at the rear of the property. In total, Roger counted twenty-seven boxes but he knew there must have been more unloaded before he arrived. Once they finished, Kevin disappeared through the gate and shut it. The two men returned to the canal boat and he watched as they set off down the river towards Stonebridge.

Roger decided he would give it a few minutes and then walk back over the bridge and risk walking along the path on the other side and past the back of Kevin's house and see if he could take a look, although he could see the fence was probably about two metres high and had what even from that distance looked like wire spikes on top.

Once he got to the metal fence, it became clear there was no way to get a look inside. The green fence was high and on the other side, apart from a gap where the gate was located, there were high and dense trees lined all along. Kevin definitely didn't want anyone seeing inside.

Roger walked back to his van to sit and wait to see if any vehicles came out. By 2 p.m., nothing had happened,. He made the decision to collect the vehicle trackers from the collection point. eBay offered a service whereby he could arrange for the items he purchased online the previous afternoon to be available for collection from the local branch of Argos after 2 p.m., Roger needed to take them back to the house, charge the batteries, read the instructions and set them up and test them. So he wouldn't be able to use them until the following day at the earliest.

An hour later, Roger had the batteries of the three devices on charge and was registering the details onto the website so he could use his phone to

track any vehicles he attached them to. The batteries would last for about two weeks before the devices needed to be charged again. He hoped that was enough time.

MODERN-DAY SLAVES

The next morning just after seven, Roger was back on Fen Road wondering what that day would bring. He didn't have to wait long. Just ten minutes after he'd arrived, the Transit van drove out. Roger followed the vehicle to a local builder's merchant where Kevin and Tyson got out and walked into the main building where Roger assumed they would pick up supplies.

He parked three bays down from the Transit and walked towards the building. Just as he got to Kevin's van, he pretended to drop his keys under the Transit and bent down, trying to make it look like he was to retrieve them. He took a transmitter out of his pocket and attached the magnet side of the device underneath the van in a place that couldn't be seen. He picked up his keys and walked on to the building. He took a quick look around and saw Kevin and Tyson over the other side picking up supplies. He walked slowly back to his van and drove out and parked up in a nearby side street and checked the transmitter was working. His phone showed a street-by-street map of the area and the position of the tracker.

It wasn't long before he saw the Transit on the move. Now he could follow it at a safe distance and not be seen. He followed them to a large house in Kimberley Road in Cherrywood just in time to see them unloading the ladder from the roof of the van. If the previous home visits were typical, it looked like they would be there for about two hours. Roger would just have to sit it out, but he had everything he needed, a flask of hot coffee, sandwiches he'd made before leaving the house, and a folded blanket to place across his lap for the times he might need to use his plastic bottle for a wee.

While he waited, he used the time to order other things he decided he needed. When he had walked down the path by the river behind Kevin's house, he noticed a man fishing under a large umbrella on the far side of the river just down from the back of Kevin's house. It could be a good place to sit and observe. He would need the fishing gear and a pair of top-quality binoculars. The ones Roger had gone for after his research were a pair of Steiner x50 Military Binoculars with anti-reflective shielding to ensure they wouldn't give off a glint of light or a momentary reflection that could give away the fact he was watching. Under the darkness of the large fisherman's umbrella, it would simply look like a man waiting for something to take the bait.

In the meantime, he would continue to watch the O'Connor family and learn everything he could about their illegal operations.

Now the tracking device was in place Roger could sit at home with his computer and track every move Kevin's Transit made. He wanted to take a closer look at the house. The fishing gear wouldn't be available for him to collect until later in the day, so he had some spare time. He got in his van and drove to his usual spot on Fen Road so he could take a walk along the riverbank and get an idea of the best vantage point. However, just as he was about to get out of his vehicle, he noticed a Transit van coming out of Kevin's drive. But this wasn't the same vehicle that he'd attached the tracker to. This vehicle had the wording 'TC Driveways' on the side.

Roger quickly jumped back in his van and followed the Transit. He had to try to keep up, and this driver was driving far quicker than the previous van.

After nearly four miles, the Transit pulled up at a big house on Parkers Piece, a small square of detached houses in an exclusive part of Cherrywood. Out of the driver's door stepped Tyson O'Connor. No wonder the driving had been different. Out of the passenger door stepped two very scruffy-looking workmen, the same ones Roger had seen unloading the boxes from the boat. They went round to the back of the van and started to unload large tools.

One of the workmen dropped an empty plastic bucket. Tyson kicked the man and went to punch him as he cowered away. Roger could see Tyson barking orders at them.

They carried a large heavy ground digger from the van to the front driveway and attached it to the portable generator and started it up. Roger

watched as Tyson spoke to one of the men and he picked up the digger and started work. The noise was extremely loud and being an engineer, Roger knew about such work. He was alarmed to see the man working without any form of ear protection.

The other man came across and shovelled the pieces of old driveway into a wheelbarrow and make a pile next to the road. Roger watched the two men working away. Many of the things he saw horrified him. The men were clearly working with old and dangerous tools. Instead of heavy boots, they were wearing scruffy trainers and the way they were being forced to labour with Tyson ordering them around, when not sitting in the van on his mobile, was far outside of modern health and safety laws.

It was exactly as the reporter from the newspaper had described. These men seemed to be modern-day slaves.

Roger had purchased some one-way blackout film for the rear windows of the van. This meant he could see out, but anyone attempting to look into the van could not see inside. He sat on the floor with the telephoto lens of his newly acquired camera taking pictures of what was happening.

THE LION AND LAMB

Who were these men and why were they prepared to work under what he considered to be Victorian era conditions? The reporter had mentioned something about this and Roger had also read things in the national newspapers, men being used as virtual slave labour. Is that what was going on here? It certainly looked like it. Another dirty string to the O'Connor bow. Roger took out the camera with its telephoto lens and took shots of the men working; he managed to capture one or two where Tyson was punching one of the men.

After observing the work for over two hours, Roger decided he'd seen enough. He didn't think he would learn much more from being there. Along with the photos, he made detailed notes. This would all be strong evidence for him to present to the police.

What he wanted to do next was see if Kevin O'Connor would visit the pub again so Roger could find a way to attach a tracker to his 4x4 while it was in the car park.

From his observation so far, he'd seen Kevin liked to go home for lunch at around one o'clock and leave again at around two.

Putting a tracking device on Kevin's 4x4 would mean Roger could sit at home and observe the places he visited. If the opportunity arose, Roger might even put a tracker onto the tarmac Transit van. And where had those two men come from? Tyson hadn't stopped to pick them up from anywhere. He'd left home and gone straight to the house they were tarmacking. Did the two men live in the O'Connors' house? Then he recalled the reporter mentioning the sheds at the back of the O'Connor property.

At ten minutes past two, Roger noticed the black 4x4 leaving the O'Connor driveway. He followed at what he judged to be a safe distance. After all the time and effort, not to mention the expense he'd put into it, he didn't want to spook the driver or make him aware he was being followed.

Just as he'd done before, Kevin made his way to the Lion and Lamb pub and stopped along the car park's right-hand side wall. Roger drove past the pub in order to give Kevin some time to get out of his vehicle and walk into the pub before he turned round and parked as close to his vehicle as possible.

Leaving three minutes, which seemed more than enough time, as Roger drove into the pub car park, he was pleased to see there was a gap next to the 4x4. He reversed into the space so his driver door would be next to Kevin's passenger side. Roger got out and walked round to the back doors of the van. There didn't appear to be anyone in the car park, and he checked to ensure Kevin wasn't still sitting in the driver's seat.

Once he was certain no one would be observing him, he placed the tracking device underneath the 4x4 where he felt it wouldn't be seen. The powerful magnet clicked as it came into contact with the metal. Roger got back in his van and checked the website on his phone to ensure the transmitter on the tracker was turned on. When he was satisfied it was working, he drove off. Judging by his previous visit, Kevin could be in the Lion and Lamb for quite some time. And if he left to go anywhere, then Roger would know without having to follow him. The £80 he paid for each device seemed like money well spent.

As it was well after 2 p.m, he could go to the collection point for the fishing gear and binoculars he'd ordered.

After Roger had all the items, he took them back to the three-bedroom house he was renting and unpacked them. A fishing rod, fishing line and hooks. The Wychwood HD Compact Brolly with groundsheet was amazing. It even included a folding bed that could also be used as a chair. The other goods included a fisherman's basket and a large foldaway trolley to carry all the gear. Normally the basket would be used for bait and fishing tackle, but as Roger had another use for it, he would store the binoculars and his food and drink instead.

After clearing all the items away and putting the empty packaging in the refuse bins, Roger checked to see the current location of the landscaping

Transit van and the 4x4. The map on the tracking device website told him the Transit van was at Fen Road and the 4x4 was still at the pub.

He had been observing Kevin and his son Tyson for a week. So far he had only followed them during the daytime when they seemed to go out and undertake work such as gardening and laying driveways at various houses. The reporter had indicated they were involved in a lot more.

From what Roger had observed a few days earlier, the canal boat could be involved. And he now had all the equipment to watch the back of the property from across the river. He needed to find out more.

Then, he wanted need to find out what they got up to at night as well. The illegal drugs trade they were rumoured to be involved in. If he could find evidence then he could report it to the police. That would put them away in prison for a very long time.

So far he had collected evidence of their daytime activities and put together a file of what he had observed. But it wasn't enough. He would need to go deeper into the murky lives of these people.

With all this undercover work, Roger was beginning to understand what the police had to do to catch criminals. It certainly wasn't like you see on TV. So far he'd spent a week watching the O'Connors, and he was only just beginning to get an idea of all the things they were involved in.

He hoped he could find some more incriminating evidence over the next two or three of weeks. He had an important trip coming up that he didn't want to miss. He would only be away for a week, so it might take another couple of months before he could move on to stage two of his plan. But if he could find enough evidence to present to the police then it would be worth it.

He never imagined he would ever be in this position. He wasn't sure if what he was doing was for revenge or justice but the more he discovered about the O'Connor family, the more determined he was to see them behind bars.

PHIL JONES

Roger Maynard was starting to see things in a different light. The more he looked in to it, the more he realised there was far more to this man than he had ever imagined.

And another thought occurred to him. Maybe if Kevin O'Connor was cunning and nasty enough to be involved in all these things then maybe, just maybe he could have bribed or threatened the witness in his daughter's hit and run to change his story. After all, the police had originally told him the witness was rock solid and highly reputable. It might be worth Roger going to speak with him. Maybe he could get a retrial and some sort of justice and closure.

But how do you go about tracking down a witness? The police would almost certainly discourage you from speaking with him. They wouldn't simply hand over his details.

One of the first things Roger needed to find out was what evidence the police would need. He didn't want to go to the police at this stage as he didn't feel he had enough information and he didn't want to play his hand too quickly. But he needed advice.

His understanding, from what he'd seen on TV shows, was that private investigators were usually ex-police officers. Maybe if he could find someone with that sort of background they could advise him on the best route to take.

Roger decided to take the easy way. He opened his iPad and searched Google for Private Investigators in Trentbridge. The first name to come up was Phil Jones Investigations.

According to the website, Phil Jones had been a high ranking police detective for thirty years before he took early retirement and started his business. Then, the previous year, he had been joined in the operation by another ex-detective James Sheldon.

Roger recalled reading about James Sheldon in the newspapers. It seems he had been a rising star in the police force until his family were killed in a hit and run. His wife and two kids had died instantly, and he had turned to drink and made homeless after pouring the mortgage payments down his throat.

So this man would understand the anguish Roger was going through.

After becoming homeless, he had found shelter behind a local hotel. Then, in a bizarre twist of fate, he had won £168 million on the Lotto. The hotel had been threatened with closure to make way for a development of luxury flats, so he had bought it to save the jobs of the people who had looked after him.

He had also invested £75 million in buying an out of town derelict council estate with 880 houses and brought it back to life and then rented the houses to local families at a knockdown price. The area had been separated from the main town being on the opposite side of the River, so he had got planning permission for a bridge to connect it with the town. He had also paid for a school and doctors surgery and allowed local industry to rent units at affordable rents to help bring jobs to the area. He had set up a charity to oversee the project and named it MJA Housing Trust, after his family: wife Miriam and kids, Jack and Abigail.

Then he had gone into a partnership of the investigation agency with his old colleague.

Yes. Maybe this could be the man who would be able to help. It was worth a phone call. But before asking for advice, it might be worth finding out just how good they are at finding people.

“Hello. Phil Jones Investigations. Phil Jones speaking. How can I help you today?”

“Oh hello, Mr Jones. My name is Roger Maynard. I’m wondering if you can help me. I’m trying to trace the address of a man called Will Gleeson who lives somewhere in Trentbridge.”

“That shouldn’t be too difficult. May I enquire why you need to contact him?”

“It’s a little difficult.”

“Mr Maynard. I’m a private investigator. I deal with the difficult every day. However, I only get involved in things that are legal so to ensure I stay within the law, I need to know your reasons. And unless what you tell me involves something illegal then everything you tell me is confidential.”

“No, I can understand that. The reason I wish to contact this man is because he was a witness when my daughter was killed in a hit and run accident. Then when it went to court, he suddenly changed his mind. I merely want to speak with him and find out if any pressure was put on him by the person involved in the hit and run who I now read in the newspaper is not as innocent as I first thought.”

“Ah. I see. And what is the name of the person involved in the hit and run?”

“Kevin O’Connor.”

“Mmm. If it’s the person, I suspect it is he’s not a nice character to get involved with. I hope you are not thinking of confronting him.”

“No. I just want to talk to the witness and find out if he was made to change his statement in any way and if he was, I hope to get him to tell the police. All I want is justice.”

“Look, Mr Maynard. Let me be straight with you. You’re speaking to an ex-police detective with over thirty years of experience. If you really want justice then don’t go to the law. My best advice is to spend time grieving over your daughter and then move on with your life. The chances of you getting justice using the court system are slim to none. There’s a good reason most police officers nowadays refer to it as the criminal injustice system. And the CPS as the Criminal Protection Service. Take my advice. Walk away.”

“I’ve made up my mind. Can you help me or not?”

“Very well. My fees are £400 a day. For that I can supply the details you want by tomorrow. I would require payment in advance.”

“Great. Thank you. Do you accept payment by Amex or I can arrange a bank transfer from my company account Trentbridge Engineering.”

“Oh, you’re that Roger Maynard. You probably don’t recall, but about twenty years ago you came and repaired one of the cells at the police station when that circus strongman we arrested nearly broke the door down.”

“Josh, yes I remember now. One of the officers told me he was the strongest man they had ever seen. He said it took six of your biggest men and a dart full of tranquiliser to overpower him. Yes, we must have met

back then. Anyway, Mr Jones, thank you for the details and I'll send a payment through to you.

“Thank you, Mr Maynard. I'll be in touch tomorrow, but please think about what I have said otherwise you'll endure months of court procedure with no closure at the end. If Kevin O'Connor has been found not guilty, even if the witness lied it might not go back to court. The Crown Prosecution Service would prefer not to get involved in cases like this. In my experience, they will try to bury it in red tape. But it's your money.”

SAVERLAND

The next day Roger Maynard received a phone call from Phil Jones.

“Good morning, Mr Maynard. I’ve just sent you a file with the details you requested plus a little more. In my experience, if you decide to approach Will Gleeson, then I would try to talk to him as he leaves work and invite him for a drink. He might not appreciate you turning up on his doorstep and he might just slam the door in your face. People can be very defensive if they are at home. It’s their familiar domain, and they feel stronger. After work, he might be in the mood for a drink and a chance to put across his side of things. If you do approach him my advice would be to smile, put out your hand to shake his as you introduce yourself and don’t raise your voice or look angry. Think of yourself as a priest taking confession. If you catch him right, he’ll open up to you. I hope that helps. The file I’ve sent over tells you where he works and what time he usually leaves. Good luck.”

Five minutes later, Roger Maynard checked his emails and found the one from Phil Jones and opened the attachment.

The file contained a lot more information than he expected.

The details saying Will Gleeson was a security guard at a wholesale warehouse called Saverland. It said he finished work at 9 p.m. The file also included a photo of him leaving work, obviously taken the previous evening, and the registration number of his blue Nissan Micra. A map showed where the staff member’s car park was and even the access code for the barrier. Phil had done a good job. There was also a note telling Roger that the wholesale warehouse was closing down at the end of the week and so he wasn’t sure where Will Gleeson would be working in the future. From

what he could find out in the time, he was due to move out of the area. Better to see him as quickly as possible.

* * *

“Hello, Mr O’Connor. It’s Will Gleeson. I did a favour for you in court.”

O’Connor’s voice was harsh. “What are you calling me for? I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“It’s not a trap. I’m not recording this. The thing is, the place where I work is closing down this week. I need some money to move down to Poole to be near my son. Look, £4,000 and I’ll be out of your hair once and for all.”

“When and where shall we meet?”

“Same place as last time. Tonight at nine o’clock.”

The line went dead. Will was surprised the man had agreed so easily but at the same time relieved. He was desperate for the cash.

The company he worked for was closing down the local branch, but they had other branches and one of them was in Poole, only a few miles from Bournemouth and if he wanted to move there he’d been told they had a vacancy for him. He didn’t really want to move there but at least that way he’d be near his son. But he needed some money for the move and a rent deposit on a flat. Paying half of his wages to his ex-wife for their son’s upkeep wasn’t easy. The cash from O’Connor would come in handy.

* * *

At eight fifteen, Roger pressed the remote control to open the garage door and put the gear on his Range Rover into drive. He was heading across town to try to speak with the witness in his daughter’s court case who had seemingly changed his mind about the events. Roger wanted to get to the bottom of it. He was hoping the man would be receptive. He wouldn’t lose his temper or make threats. He just wanted to find the truth and get justice for his daughter and her friend.

It was 8.32 p.m., when Roger Maynard’s Range Rover glided into the staff car park of the Saverland wholesale warehouse and reversed into a space against the wall, hidden in shadow and about ten yards from the blue

Nissan. From this position, Roger could see both the vehicle and the staff exit that Phil Jones had marked on the map. “Wow. That Phil Jones sure thinks of everything,” Roger murmured.

THE CHASE

The traffic had been lighter than he expected so Roger had arrived earlier than he planned. He parked the car in a corner of the car park of the staff car park of the wholesale warehouse where Will Gleeson worked as a security officer. Roger touched a button to recline his seat and put the CD player on low volume.

Five minutes later, lying back in his seat listening to a Lene Marlin album, he failed to notice the black BMW make its way into the car park and come to a halt on the opposite side, close to the staff exit.

As the fifth track faded out, the alarm he had set on his phone timer beeped. He turned off the CD and waited.

After a few minutes, he noticed the man as the witness he had seen in court and also from the photo supplied by Phil Jones. The man was walking towards the Nissan Micra. It was the same registration number Phil Jones had written in his report.

Roger switched off the music and was about to get out of his car when he noticed two men approaching Will Gleeson. Roger recognised both men. Kevin O'Connor and one of his sons who had been in the courtroom and was pointed out to him by one of the police officers as someone to avoid contact with. What did they want with Will Gleeson?

Roger decided to stay in his vehicle and wait and see what would happen. The words of Phil Jones went through his mind. *Not a nice character to get involved with.*

Roger watched as Kevin O'Connor looked around the car park. Not a soul in sight. The floodlight set high in the car park shone down bouncing off the windscreen of Roger's Range Rover at the wrong angle and with his

seat still in the reclining position, the reflection making it appear no one was in the vehicle.

Roger watched as Kevin O'Connor's son Tyson reached into his coat pocket, and suddenly he saw him draw out a gun. Will Gleeson noticed it and turned to run, but it was too late. The bullet found its mark, and he fell instantly. Tyson walked over until he was towering above the figure looking up at him with his left arm raised in a vain attempt to stop what was about to happen. Tyson took aim and delivered one more gunshot to the head. As Will lay there lifeless, the two men walked away.

Roger was shaking. He jumped forward in his seat. Did he really just witness a cold-blooded murder?

His elbow accidentally touched the car hooter.

The two men looked round. The light was still reflecting off the windscreen. Kevin O'Connor crouched down and looked towards the vehicle. Roger couldn't hear what he said to his son, but he guessed it wasn't good. Both walked towards the Range Rover.

Roger pressed the reset button to adjust his seat and then hit the start button and put the vehicle into drive. The headlights came on automatically and for a second, blinded the two approaching figures directly in front. Roger floored the accelerator and drove at both men who jumped out of the way.

As he approached the exit barrier, in his rear view mirror, Roger could see them run towards a dark-coloured BMW parked in the opposite corner of the car park. That gave him a few seconds start on them.

Getting to the barrier, Roger keyed in the exit code. The barrier seemed to take forever to rise and with every second it took he felt his heart would jump out of his chest. Once he was sure it was clear, he drove off at speed.

As he reached the corner of Turner Street, he could see the BMW's headlights. It wouldn't take long before they caught up with him.

His mind was racing. He'd just seen a man shot down in cold blood. Now the two men responsible were in a car that was right behind. He knew they wouldn't hesitate for a second to kill him. He had to think. What could he do? He needed to get away, but they had an equally powerful car, no chance of outrunning them. He needed to think fast. Maybe he could head for the police station, but from visiting at the time of his daughter's death, he knew the entrance door was on a buzzer system. By the time he'd

pressed the button and spoken to the person inside, the chances were he'd be dead.

And he couldn't go home.

"Quick, think, think of something. Or you're a dead man."

THE PHONE CALL

Roger clicked the voice command function on the dashboard.

“Call Phil Jones.”

The phone rang six times. Roger silently prayed for it to be answered.

“Hello, this is Phil Jones.”

“Phil. It’s Roger Maynard. I’m in really deep shit. I went to visit Will Gleeson, but O’Connor and his son Tyson were there. They killed him in cold blood. Shot him right in front of me. I was sitting in my car. They spotted me. Now they’re chasing me. What do I do?”

“Okay. Look. Listen carefully. You mean you’re in a vehicle, and they are behind you in another vehicle. Is that what you’re telling me?”

“Yes.”

“Where are you? Tell me exactly.”

“I’m on Hills Road just past the railway station and heading towards the hospital. I might fucking need it if they catch me.”

“Listen carefully. Carry on along Hills Road. When you get to the hospital, instead of turning right at the roundabout go straight over. Then after about a mile, there’s a turning on the right towards Cherrywood old town.”

“Yes, I know the one.”

“Good. Take it, and then after a few yards get in the middle of the road so they can’t overtake you and slow right down to about ten miles an hour. Make them think you’re going to stop but just keep going at low speed.”

“What good will that do?”

“Trust me. It should take you about three or four minutes to get there. Don’t stop for anything. Keep this line open and tell me when you get to the

roundabout at the hospital. Make sure whatever you do you stay on the line. If the phone cuts out, call me back, okay?”

“Whatever you say. Get me out of this mess, and I’ll pay you whatever you ask.”

“Don’t worry about the money. Let’s just make sure you’re safe.”

“Phil, I’m coming up to the hospital roundabout. Go straight over you said?”

“Yeah. Head straight over and then take the turn. Whatever you do don’t miss the turn. That’s important.”

What seemed like a lifetime but was only four minutes later, Roger turned right down Granhams Lane.

“Okay, Phil. I’ve turned right into the lane. What next?”

“Move to the centre of the road so they can’t pass you and slow right down to about ten miles an hour. Trust me. In a few seconds, I’m going to ask you to floor it. When I do whatever happens just go full speed. Are you in the Range Rover?”

“Yeah. How did you know?”

“Doesn’t matter.”

“They’re right behind me. What do I do?”

“Keep your nerve. Keep to the centre of the road and slow down.”

“Are you sure about this?”

“Trust me. Do you have sports mode?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay, engage it. Just a few more yards and then I want you to really floor it. Get ready. Three, two, one, NOW!”

As Roger’s right foot hit the accelerator, he felt sure he saw a small gap in the hedgerow on his left and a car parked there, but he wasn’t hanging around to find out. The Range Rover responded immediately, opening up a gap between the cars. The BMW seemed to have been caught by surprise, but it only took a second for the driver to respond.

Kevin O’Connor sped up to give chase then heard a large thud from under his vehicle. As he sped up to chase the Range Rover, it seemed like the steering had gone and the car was swaying from side to side. Something was wrong. As he tried to accelerate the car became more unresponsive and wouldn’t steer straight. He needed to stop and check what was wrong. As he slowed down, he noticed what looked like car headlights appear from a gap in the hedgerow of a field a few yards behind. Then a vehicle roared

out from the gap and sped away in the direction he had just come from. He couldn't see the registration number; it had been covered.

As Kevin examined the tyres of the BMW, he could see small hollow spikes. The car that had been hidden in the hedgerow gap. Someone in it must have had a police stinger.

"The bastard had help. How the fuck did he manage to arrange that?"

Kevin made a call to Joey's garage on Fen Road. Someone would be there in fifteen minutes with a tow truck.

Tyson had managed to get the registration number of the Range Rover. As they waited, Kevin made a quick phone call to a contact who ran a private car parking company and had access to the DVLA database and would be able to obtain the details of the registered owner of the vehicle.

They needed to find out who had been in the Range Rover and what the game was. Then they could arrange a night-time visit and deal with the problem.

Roger was still on his mobile to Phil Jones.

"Wow! What just happened? They slowed down. Was that you I noticed in the hedgerow? What did you do?"

"Glad you're safe. Let's just say you were lucky I live nearby and I find it handy to keep a couple of police issue items in the boot."

"I'm extremely grateful. They would have killed me."

"And they still might if you go home. We need to ensure you're safe. Is there anyone at your house?"

"No. With my daughter gone, I live alone."

"Okay. Now whatever you do don't go back there. I have a friend who runs a hotel. You might be best going there for tonight. Do you know the Milton Motel?"

"Yes. I've seen it."

"Go there. Drive into the car park on the right-hand side of the hotel and go round to the back. On the left, you'll see a silver metal door garage. Drive past it and park on the far side. Go into the hotel and ask for Gerry Payne. Tell him I sent you. I'll phone him and explain the situation. He'll look after you."

"Oh, God. I just thought. Will Gleeson. He's lying there. Some poor sod will discover his body. What if it's someone with a weak heart."

"Don't worry. It's all been taken care of. An anonymous call was made to the police just after you called me. Go and get some sleep, and I'll come

and join you after you've had some breakfast. You can't say I didn't warn you about Kevin O'Connor and his family. He'll have an alibi for tonight. And the BMW is almost certainly stolen. It'll most likely have been torched by now. Get a good night's rest, and I'll talk to you in the morning."

Twenty minutes later, the Range Rover pulled in alongside the garage at the rear of the Milton Motel, and Roger Maynard made his way round to the hotel reception desk to be greeted by Gerry Payne.

THE MILTON MOTEL

“Hello, you must be Roger Maynard,” said a friendly voice.

“How on earth did you know that?”

“I was a detective until I retired and bought this place. I can see the fear in your face and Phil told me to expect someone with that look. Don’t worry. A good night’s rest and it will all seem much better tomorrow. If you’d like to follow me, I’ll show you to your room.”

The reason Phil Jones had sent him to the Milton Motel was that Gerry Payne was a former colleague. Over recent years as the police force had become more political, a lot of the best people had decided to take early retirement and start their own businesses.

Nowadays it was more about management services and people from university. People with the right qualifications, but no real experience of what the job entails, were being fast tracked up the ladder.

The College of Policing was offering fast track and direct entry programmes. Their website offered university educated graduates the opportunity to become a Superintendent within two years, rather than work their way through the ranks by their effort and on-the-job experience.

Their website offered:

The Direct Entry at Superintendent programme supports the National Policing Vision in helping to bring existing exceptional leaders into the police service to make an immediate impact on culture, efficiency and effectiveness. This will be achieved by opening up entry to the service to proven leaders who will join policing directly at the rank of superintendent rather than having to work their way up from the rank of constable.

Programme members will be trained over eighteen months and given coaching and mentoring, to equip them with the skills required to perform as a superintendent, inspiring confidence in officers, staff and the public. This will create a cohort that has the potential to further develop and acquire the skills and experience to progress to the chief officer ranks.

It meant the police were losing highly experienced officers who could see their future career opportunities limited if they hadn't attended a prestige university.

The lower ranks would be expected to work long hours; fourteen-hour shifts were becoming the norm, as paying overtime was seen as being cheaper than recruiting new raw recruits. Of course, the fast trackers, once they reached superintendent, would probably only work normal office hours.

The local golf club had seen its membership grow as these new fast trackers made every effort to spend their time in the company of their superiors.

Members of the club not associated with the police called them the arse licker brigade.

Luckily, Gerry's wife Paddy had been a bookkeeper with a local firm of accountants, and when the previous owners of the motel had decided to retire, she knew how profitable the business was and how much potential it had for the future. With Gerry's police pension and their savings, they had worked out it was a good investment.

Over the past few months they had upgraded the rooms from the traditional style of the previous elderly owners to a more contemporary décor that had more appeal to upmarket travellers and at the same time had extended the front of the hotel and were in the process of moving the run-down coffee lounge from the side to a bright modern extension that had been added to the front.

So far half of the bedrooms had been transformed. Out went the frilly curtains and dated furniture and velour headboards. In came fresh paint in nice neutral colours, window blinds and a minimal look with fitted sliding wardrobes where old Victorian dark oak free standing wardrobes had previously been.

"Don't you want my credit card and details?"

"All in good time. Phil's vouched for you. He said you're an honest guy. That's good enough for me. He said you had gone through some trauma, so I put a miniature whiskey in your room, compliments of the hotel. A drink will help you settle. Then get some rest and tomorrow is another day."

Roger found his room and entered, switching on the light and seeing the bottle next to the two-seater sofa. He poured a good measure into the glass and drank. It felt good. Really good. His mind couldn't settle. What had he got himself into? More importantly, how was he going to get out of it? He really hoped Phil had the answer because at that precise moment he didn't have a clue.

Two hours later, he looked at his watch. 1.30 a.m., Sleep just wasn't happening. he got up and sat on the two-seater sofa. Gradually his eyelids felt heavy. He made it to the bed and within a few minutes had managed to drop off to sleep.

The alarm on Roger's watch woke him at his usual time of 6.30am. Time for a shower. No way to shave as he hadn't arrived with a razor. Perhaps he could borrow one. Or perhaps, for once, he could just go unshaven. What the hell. He had more important things to worry about.

Breakfast at the Milton Motel was served from 7 a.m. As Roger walked in at ten past, he noted three tables were already occupied. The waitress came over, a warm smile on her face.

“Good morning. Table for one is it?”

“Yes please.”

The young waitress led Roger over to a small table near the corner. “Would you like toast and tea or coffee?”

“Yes, toast and coffee would be lovely.”

She placed a menu in front of Roger. “Please help yourself to cereal and juice. I’ll come back and take your order for breakfast shortly.”

Roger studied the menu. He wasn’t sure what the day ahead held for him, but he knew it would be full on, and he would need some strength.

As he sat drinking the coffee, the waitress had brought over and as she took his order for a full English breakfast his phone tinged.

He looked at the message. *When you’re ready let me know, and we can discuss your options. Whatever you do, don’t go home. They will have your address by now and could be waiting for you. Phil.*

THE MEETING

After finishing his breakfast, Roger headed back to his room. He needed to be alone. To think about what had happened. To decide what he should do. He'd seen the man who killed his only daughter and her best friend walk free from court. Then he'd seen the same man murder the witness in cold blood and then attempt to murder him.

Deep down he knew O'Connor would stop at nothing to try to kill him. After all, he was now the witness to a murder. He needed advice from someone with more knowledge about these things. He could trust Phil Jones.

Roger sent a text. *I'm ready.*

Within two minutes, his phone rang.

"Hello, Phil."

"Hello, Roger. Hope you got some sleep last night. I'm on my way over. I'll be there in a few minutes. I've just spoken with Gerry. He has a small meeting room we can use. Ask the girl on reception; she'll point you to it. I'll see you soon."

Roger waited a couple of minutes and then walked from his room to reception. The girl gave him directions to the meeting room.

The door was open, and he walked in. The room consisted of a table in the centre with four chairs. At the far end were three sofas arranged around a large coffee table.

Just as Roger was deciding where to sit, the door opened and a gentleman in his fifties entered.

"Hello, Roger, Phil Jones. Pleased to meet you again after all these years. Sorry it's under such bad circumstances but let's see what we can do

to help the situation, shall we?”

Roger sat down at the table. As a businessman, this felt more familiar to him than discussing things on a sofa.

Phil Jones walked over to a percolator. “Would you like a coffee?”

The two sat facing each other, both with their coffee cups on the table. Phil had a thin briefcase which he had laid on the table. He pulled out an A4 size pad and a pen.

“Before we start. I have to warn you. On the record and as an ex-detective, I should advise you to contact the police and give them a statement. Off the record, I would warn you that many of my ex-colleagues who are still in the job believe that the O’Connors have a mole inside the police station. Sadly, I have to say I think you would be in danger if you relied on them to protect you.

“If I’m to help you I need to know the details of what you saw. I’d like you to talk me through everything you can. Start at the beginning and try to give me as much detail as you can. Don’t assume I know anything and don’t leave anything out, no matter how trivial it may seem. I may see things that you aren’t aware of, but I can’t do that unless you tell me everything. Do you understand?”

Roger nodded. “I went to see Mr Gleeson to talk to him and find out why he had changed his statement in court. I was sitting in my car in the car park where he works from the details you sent me. I noticed him walking towards his car and was about to get out when I saw O’Connor and his son Tyson. So I stayed in the car to see what they wanted. I thought they might be meeting him to give him money. I had the idea they might of paid him off.”

Roger went on to explain the details of seeing the shooting.

“My first thought was to drive to the police station, but I remembered from going there to meet the detective in charge of my daughter’s hit and run that the outside doors are on a buzzer. You can’t just open them. I thought if they were right behind me they’d gun me down before I could get inside. So I just drove and as I trawled through my phone to find someone to help, your name came up, and luckily you answered. The rest you know.”

Phil Jones looked up from the pad where he’d been making notes.

“On my way over this morning, I spoke to a friend of mine on the force and got the latest. It appears the security cameras for the car park had the wires cut, so there are no CCTV pictures. That’s probably the reason Kevin

and Tyson weren't wearing hoodies, and you recognised them. Will Gleeson was shot twice. One shot at close range. He didn't stand a chance. It was a very professional job. Obviously not the first time they've done it. It certainly has all the hallmarks of a seasoned professional. You have to make some difficult choices about your future. Do you have other family members? How about your wife or other children? Your parents or brothers or sisters?"

"Julie was my only child. My wife and I are divorced although we still get on okay. Both my parents are alive, but I'm an only child, so no brothers or sisters."

"The weak spot is going to be your ex-wife and parents. Knowing the O'Connors, they'll try to get at you any way they can. How about people at work? Anyone you're close to?"

"Not in a romantic sense if that's what you're getting at. But I have a number of people who have worked for me for many years and are very loyal."

Phil's voice sounded serious. "As you've already seen, Kevin is prepared to do whatever it takes to eliminate any witnesses. If he thinks you are a witness to the murder of the security guard, then he'll come after you with everything he's got. This is not a man to be underestimated. The police have been trying to get something on him for years. The only time he's been to prison was a few years ago when he was prosecuted for shoddy building work and taking people's money under false pretences.

He went on. "You could become a witness and testify in court, but he's a slippery customer, and there's no guarantee of a conviction. There have been rumours for years that he's got someone on the inside at the police station. If that's true, he could find out where you're being held before the trial; then you can imagine what he'll do. I'm not trying to influence you in any way, but you need to think about your next move very carefully. The O'Connor family is ruthless. To be honest with you, I'm not sure what the answer is at the moment. All I know is these people will stop at nothing to find you and kill you. Even if you do decide to involve the police, I'm not sure you'll be safe. I have to warn you that as long as you stay in Trentbridge, your life is in danger. When we were chatting earlier, you mentioned a cruise due to depart next week."

"Yes. I booked it a few months ago, before my daughter Julie was killed. It's a World War One Centenary Cruise to visit France and Belgium.

My grandfather was in the war at the Battle of Mons and was one of the first soldiers to receive the 1914 star and due to an act of extreme bravery, he was later awarded the Victoria Cross. So I planned to go and pay my respects both to my grandfather who managed to make it through the war, and to the brave lads who didn't come back."

"Is your passport at home?"

"No. Because I make a business trip to Europe every few weeks, I leave it in my safe at work."

"I suggest you go on the cruise. It will give time for things to settle down and O'Connor is unlikely to find out where you are. It should give us time to think of something. And I would advise you not to go home for any reason. They will probably have your home address by now. They could be waiting for you. You'll need clothes and stuff for your cruise, but I suggest you buy them just before you get on the ship. In the meantime what are your plans?"

"I'll stay here for a day or two and think about my options. In the meantime can I hire you exclusively for the next ten days and then we can re-assess the situation?"

"Of course. I think it's best if you talk to your ex-wife and parents, and explain the situation. I'll have a word with someone I know at the station 'on the quiet' and see if they can arrange for patrol cars to make a regular sweep of their addresses just in case the O'Connors try to do something.

"There's one other thing I would recommend you do, so you can work out who you can trust. Buy two new Pay As You Go mobile phones. Mark one with an 'F' and the other with a 'P'. Tell the police you have a new number and give them the one with the 'P'. Give the other number to family and people you really trust. That way you will know if anyone is feeding information to O'Connor.

* * *

Three days later when Phil Jones checked with Gerry Payne at the Milton Motel, he was told Roger had paid his bill and left two hours earlier, thanking Gerry for his help but not saying where he intended to go.

Phil was glad that Roger had taken his advice and not told anyone where he was going. He knew Gerry could be trusted, but it meant Roger

was following his instructions to the letter.

Roger had phoned Wendy Northgate at his company Trentbridge Engineering. His instruction had been crystal clear. Although the factory had normal security in place, she was to contact Atkins Alarm Systems and have state of the art surveillance cameras and security alarms installed all around the factory with optic fibre feed to their control room. And also speak with Herald Security and have them supply four of their best security people twenty-four hours of the day. No expense was to be spared. Also get the boys in the workshop to install security access barriers to stop any ram raids.

Once Roger was happy his instructions had been understood and would be carried out, he decided he would take the cruise. It was due to leave from Southampton. Before he'd left the Milton Motel, he had arranged for one of his staff members to drop off a company Mercedes in the car park. Wendy had given the staff member a sealed envelope with Roger's passport inside. If Phil Jones was right then Kevin's contact at Trentbridge police might have a way of tracing Roger's Range Rover if he used it on the road. This way he could be fairly certain no one would know his whereabouts.

Seven nights cruising around and seeing the sights of France and Belgium would give him time to think. Something he was extremely good at. His sharp mind and clear vision, especially under pressure had been what had allowed him to build his multi-million-pound business from the ground up. That, and his sheer determination to see things through, no matter what it took.

The ship had set sail on time at 6.30 p.m. After a meal in the luxury dining room he had a couple of drinks in the bar and then made his way back to his room. Maybe it was the fresh sea air, or maybe it was the sheer exhaustion of the last few days but it didn't take him long to nod off to sleep. To imagine a life in which his daughter was still around.

In his dream, he could see her face as he took her down to the equestrian centre and told her the place was hers. He could *feel* Julie close to him. It was the first night for as long as he could remember he had slept soundly all night without the recurring nightmare.

EDEN AND TRACY

It was just after 9 p.m., when DI Eden Gold walked into his empty house after stopping off at the local Chinese takeaway. With the long hours he worked and as he was never home, his girlfriend had left him a year after they had moved to Trentbridge and went back to London. He'd just finished his meal and a couple of glasses of wine and was settling down on the sofa, getting ready to watch some football on the Sky Sports channel. The game hadn't even started when his phone rang informing him of an anonymous 999 call alerting the police to a body in the Saverland staff car park.

DS Tracy Archer had just arrived at her apartment after a visit to Scruffs hair salon, when she got her phone call. She had paid £89 for the privilege of a cut and finish by one of the directors. On top of this, she had left an £11 tip to the young trainee who had washed her hair. Washing hair it seemed was beneath a director. But Tracy had to admit the finished result was worth every penny. Her stunning golden copper hair looked exquisite. Even after the cut, it fell just short of her teardrop-shaped breasts. And with a stunning body, thick curvy lips, round blue eyes, flawless skin and her stunning smile, it was no surprise that before joining the police she'd had offers of a modelling career but what did surprise her friends was when she decided to walk away from it after six months.

As she picked up the newspaper she had bought, it was the date on the front cover that reminded her of the anniversary. Had it really been eight years?

Her father had been a police officer. A detective chief inspector but eight years earlier, while investigating a local corruption case he had told people he was going to meet a potential whistle blower and then simply

disappeared. As time went on it was assumed he had been murdered, although no body was ever found and despite a long and extensive investigation, no suspect was ever put in the frame.

By the time Eden arrived at the scene, DS Tracy Archer was already there.

“Hi, Tracy. What have we got?”

“Hi, Eden. It looks like the guy has been shot. His ID says he’s Will Gleeson, ring any bells?”

“The witness in the O’Connor hit and run who suddenly had a memory lapse?”

“Yeah, he worked here as a security guard. That’s his car over there; we found the keys next to it. Looks like he was running away from something, or someone.”

Tracy pointed to the rear of the warehouse. “There’s a camera up there. I’ve got the manager coming back so we can check the footage.”

“Let’s hope whoever did it wasn’t aware of the camera, although knowing our luck they were all hooded up. Any thoughts?”

“You know bloody well what I’m thinking. The same as you. Kevin O’Connor. He must have paid the witness off for the trial, and the guy made the mistake of asking for more.”

“That would make sense. I assume there’s no sign of a break-in at the warehouse, so why else would someone shoot a security guard in a car park.”

“The victim still has his wallet and cards, so the motive doesn’t appear to be robbery. Unless he was into other things we don’t know about. Let’s get a full background check on him. I assume you’ve got someone to go to his address?”

“Yes, one of the first things I did was to run a check on his vehicle and get his home address.”

“We can’t do much more here until forensics have been over it all. Let’s head to his place and see what he’s been up to.”

“We’ll both have to go in your car, Tracy. I had a couple of glasses of wine before I got the call, so I had uniform pick me up. I didn’t want to risk it.”

“No problem, Eden. And I can drop you off at yours.”

It was three years since Eden had moved to the area and started working with Tracy yet he knew very little about her. She seemed like a dedicated

officer, although she did make the odd mistake and her paperwork could be a bit shambolic from time to time.

Eden knew he wasn't perfect. He could be a bit moody when things didn't go the way he hoped. He knew he was drinking slightly more than he should and needed to exercise more. He had noticed his clothes were getting a bit tight.

"I need to go on a diet and get more exercise," Eden remarked as Tracy drove.

"I didn't want to say anything, but I've overheard people calling you doughboy," she said as she glanced across at Eden with a grin across her face.

"Bloody charming. I suppose you go to the gym three times a week?"

"On my salary? You must be joking. No, I go jogging and exercise at home. An ex-boyfriend taught me a routine which I still use. Probably the only good thing I got out of the entire relationship."

"A relationship. What's that? I haven't had a social life for a couple of years."

"You're not missing much. Believe me, they're overrated."

They drove on in silence for a couple of minutes until Eden said, "I just got a new local corruption case land on my desk today. I heard something about your dad being in the force and investigating a corruption case. How did that go? Is he still around?"

"He was. Haven't you heard the stories?"

"No. All I heard was your dad was a detective."

"Yes, I forgot, you only moved here last year. He was based here in Trentbridge, a DCI. Eight years ago he was running a local council corruption case involving a lot of high-profile people. A really complicated case, by all accounts. He went to meet someone who was going to blow the whistle on the whole thing. He was never seen again. All the files disappeared as well. Of course, they did a major investigation, but nothing came of it. I know he must have been killed but they never even found a suspect. I guess deep down inside it's one of the reasons I joined up, to try to find out what happened to my dad."

"Gosh, I'm sorry. No, I've never heard any of that. It's just this case and what I'd heard. I'm sorry to drag up something..." Eden could see Tracy was upset and decided to stop before he put his foot in it even further.

They travelled on in silence for the remainder of the five-minute journey.

“This is it. 26 Ross Street. Flat three, on the first floor.”

* * *

It was a rare feeling for Kevin O'Connor. Normally he couldn't give a fuck about anything. But this time it seemed different. When he and Tyson had gone to deal with Will Gleeson after he demanded more money to keep quiet about the hit and run incident he wasn't to know there would be a witness. Maybe he was slipping or getting complacent? Normally he would have covered his tracks, worked out every angle in advance, and always came out on top. Perhaps he'd been too quick off the mark. When Gleeson said he wanted another four grand, he should have just given it to him. But it was the principle.

It wasn't a good time. He had a lot on his mind. There were some big deals going down, and the last thing he needed was the police sniffing round. He might be a big man in Trentbridge, but the people he'd been working with from Europe were not the sort even he would think of crossing.

Bringing in illegal immigrants and the new Monkey dust drug, using the river and canals from Liverpool was working well. He'd used it to bring in illegals for the past year. And now he was using it to bring in drugs. With the River Stern right at the back of his property on Fen Road, he could keep everything very low key. No one suspected what he was up to.

The police often stopped vehicles on the motorways and found drugs. No-one suspected a slow moving canal boat to be carrying drugs. It was the perfect form of transport. No police patrols or drug squad to worry about.

He knew with his contact on the inside that he could handle the police, so the only thing upsetting Kevin was the witness. Take him out, and he could relax.

POLITICAL CORRUPTION

There had been a number of complaints about a local politician who, according to a whistle blower who worked on the inside, was abusing her position of power and wasting vast sums of public money. Questions were being asked as to where all the money was being spent. And it seemed that in her capacity as a member of the planning committee, she could be involved in a lot of council land being sold off to a small group of developers for amounts that appeared to be far below their market value.

DI Eden Gold and DS Tracy Archer worked well together as a team. However, their latest case had brought back a few bad memories for Tracy.

Eight years earlier, her father was a Detective Chief Inspector with Trentbridge police. He had spent nearly two months investigating a major fraud case allegedly involving local politicians, councillors, members of the planning department, and a local developer. Then one afternoon, after telling a colleague he was going off to meet a potential informant, he failed to return and was never seen again. Despite a major investigation, it had remained a mystery. Then all the files of the case disappeared. After six months in which little progress was made, the whole episode was gradually run down, although cases are never officially closed.

* * *

The closed session meeting had been arranged for 7 p.m., for the selection of the new North-West England Secretary-General. For the majority of ordinary people, it was an event that passed without them being aware. For the people involved it was an exciting development.

The usual political unspoken agreement of 'if you elect me, I will elect you'. The four committee members would not only get to vote on where their new headquarters would be but also to what extent they were furnished and the salary and perks they would receive. If anyone was to enquire, the message would be the old boys (and girls) network was alive and well. Thank you very much.

The head of this new 'quango' was Baroness Sanjrani who had a background as a barrister and legal advisor. Five years of learning how to take common everyday language and turn it into gobbledegook so that the lawyer representing the other party involved can turn the gobbledegook back into common language and charge upwards of £200 an hour for the privilege. And if you have charged your client thousands for preparing a contract and the lawyer on the other side finds a loophole, then it's the client who has already forked out thousands in the first place who pays and not the lawyer who failed to spot the loophole. A win-win situation for the legal profession. Nice work if you can get it.

In surveys of the most trusted professions, year after year, lawyers have consistently failed to make it into the top ten.

Baroness Sanjrani had decided that one of her first 'duties' would be to oversee the awarding of a contract for the efficient running of the organisation and its forty-two members of staff. However, instead of the usual tendering procedure, she had decided to award the contract worth £23,000 per month to the company of a friend that two years earlier had nearly been struck off by Companies House for failing to file any accounts.

The company run by Ismail Musharraf, one of her closest friends and run from his home address, didn't appear to have any employees. Neither did it have a website or a landline phone number. Many people thought this was a strange set up for a company that purported to offer advice on efficiency. Furthermore, a separate contract was awarded to the same organisation to oversee the operations it was conducting. So, to outsiders, it looked like the company was being paid a second time to oversee it was doing a good job. Nice work if you can get it.

It wasn't the first quango Baroness Sanjrani had been involved with. She knew the ropes. With her legal background, she had plenty of practice of how to operate within the law. Even if it was a bit murky to anyone looking in. But don't worry. We are dealing in political circles, and they always look after their own.

As one commentator was quoted as saying, "Politics. The only thing that could give shit a good name."

A whistle blower had raised questions about what was happening in the organisation. It seemed a lot of money was being used for purposes other than what it was intended for. A garden party had been organised, and £45,000 was spent, which seemed to offer no benefit to the organisation, the main attendees had been the family and friends of the Baroness.

Several people came forward with accusations of cronyism and venality, and called for a probe into her use of public funds.

Furthermore, she was close to a number of local councillors and plots of land had been sold to members of her family at well below their market value. And planning permission had then been granted and the plots sold to larger developers for a vast sum.

Then the police had been called in to try to find out what was happening. The Baroness had exerted her immense political influence to try to stop the investigation. The chief constable had been bombarded with phone calls from people in the corridors of power at Westminster. However, the matter had been reported in several newspapers that supported the government and with elections not that far off, it was deemed a good move to be seen to be doing '*something*', rather than the usual promises of action followed up by sweeping the whole affair under the carpet. However, in such case, it wasn't to say anything would happen and blame apportioned. What usually happened was that once it reached its conclusion *after* the elections had been held, the matter would be held up in endless red tape until it could be gently laid to rest with the conclusion that everything had been legally adhered to.

BACK FROM THE CRUISE

As Roger Maynard stepped off the ship after seven days with time to reflect, he had made the decision that to go after Kevin O'Connor and his sons would only take him down to their level. He had worked all his life to become a role model for Julie and revenge would not be a fitting tribute to his daughter. It was time to put the past behind him and try to look to the future.

Three hours later on his way home, Roger had pulled into a service station just on the edge of Trentbridge to buy some milk. He hoped the danger was over, and he could go home.

The O'Connors would have realised that he hadn't gone to the police. They had probably forgotten all about him and gone about their dirty business, no doubt.

Last year he had received a proposal from a rival engineering firm to buy his business. They had put forward an offer of £12 million. If it was still on the table maybe he would take their offer and move abroad. After all, with Julie gone and his ex-wife Francis living with another man, he had no one. His parents were both still alive, but he could visit them, and they could visit him.

He had always fancied Switzerland. Flights from Birmingham to Geneva only took an hour and forty minutes.

Arriving home, Roger could see he had just missed the housekeeper. He had phoned her as he left Southampton and she had left a note for him saying she had been to the supermarket and stocked up the fridge and freezer for him.

So I didn't need to buy the milk, he thought.

Phil Jones had sent regular text messages to Roger with updates. He had called in favours and ensured that regular police patrols had kept an eye on Roger's parents' and his ex-wife's addresses. So far there had been no sign of the O'Connors.

Having been away for a week, Roger decided it might be nice to phone his parents and invite them over the following day for Sunday lunch.

"I'm not really sure I could face coming to the house, Roger. All the photos and memories of Julie might set me off again. Couldn't we go out to a restaurant?"

"Yes, of course, Mum. If that's what you want. I'll come and pick you both up at twelve thirty, and we can go to The Masons Arms. One of the girls in my office is always telling me they do a lovely Sunday lunch. I'll book a table for one o'clock, if that's alright?"

* * *

Roger and his parents Vernon and Elsie arrived at the pub five minutes early. It looked like a traditional back-street pub from the outside and quite small. As the trio walked into the bar, it was already busy, the people behind the bar serving eager customers. The bar had a high shelf above the counter where all the pint glasses were kept. Roger couldn't help but smile as he noticed a young lady obviously needing to stand on tip toes and still having to stretch really hard to reach a glass. He wondered how many times a day she needed to do that and if the person who had given her the job had thought about her height before taking her on.

The restaurant section of the pub was at the rear. Roger and his parents walked through. It was obvious the people running the pub were proud to be British, and Manchester United fans. Every wall had a union jack and replica red football shirts of their team.

Roger counted eight tables with seating for up to four people and two tables for parties of up to eight. As they walked in, a waiter came over.

“Have you booked a table, sir?”

“Yes, for three in the name of Maynard.”

“I have a nice table for you at the back. Please follow me.”

The waiter led them over to the bay window where a table had been prepared and had a small folded sign saying ‘Reserved’ which he removed.

“Here we are. I’ll bring over the menus in a moment. In the meantime would you like to order any drinks?”

They did so and Roger sat facing the bay window and a view of a small but well-kept garden area while his parents had a view of the restaurant.

“Looks like a busy place,” said Elsie.

“Let’s hope that means the food is good,” said Vernon.

Fifty minutes later, after they had paid the bill and left a generous tip, the three walked out of the pub. They didn’t notice a man emerging from the corridor that led to the gents toilets, but he noticed them.

As they walked the short distance to where Roger had managed to park the car, his father said, “I have to say, that was one of the best roast dinners I’ve had in a long time.”

“Yes, nice fresh vegetables. None of that frozen rubbish you get in a lot of places,” added Elsie.

“Glad you enjoyed it,” said Roger.

As the Mercedes pulled out, the black 4x4 began to follow them.

As Roger pulled onto their front drive, he failed to see the 4x4 pull in and park a few car spaces down the road from his parents' bungalow.

Inside the house, they sat down in the lounge.

"I'm going to make a cup of tea. Would you like one, Roger?"

"Yes please, Mum."

A short time later, Elsie returned holding a tray with three cups, which she placed down on separate coasters on top of an Ercol solid ash coffee table.

"Now, Roger, what was it you wanted to talk about?" asked his mum.

"I'm thinking of selling the business and moving to Switzerland. I have to face the fact Julie is gone, and it looks like Francis is happy with her new man so apart from the pair of you there's really nothing left. Clifton Engineering have made me a generous offer to buy the business lock stock and barrel with the assurance of keeping all the members of staff, so I really don't see much else to keep me here. Flights from Geneva take one hour forty minutes so coming to visit you or you coming to me shouldn't be a problem."

"We would hate to see you go, son, but with everything that's happened, I can see you probably want a change of scenery. All I would ask is that you give it some more thought. Don't make a hasty decision. We're off for two

weeks' holiday down to Cornwall tomorrow. Why don't you think it over while we're away."

"I'm not in a hurry. That seems like a good idea. If I still feel the same, I'll accept their offer. But I won't decide before then, and of course, I'll come and tell you first. I promise."

THE MASONS ARMS

From the 4x4, Lennox made a call. “Hello, Dad. I was in The Masons Arms, and I saw our friend with what looked like his parents. I’ve followed them back to a place just off Huntingdon Road called Thornton Gardens, number seven. It looks like they live here. Our friend’s inside with them now. What do you want me to do?”

“Come home, son. I’ll get Vinny to go and park near his house and see if he goes back there. If he does then perhaps we’ll give him a special surprise visit later.”

Five minutes after arriving at his dad’s house, Tyson was sitting on the two-seater leather sofa watching football when his brother Lennox walked in.

“Where you been, bro?” Tyson asked Lennox.

“Out.”

“I reckon you’ve got a bird. And I bet she’s married the way you creep about. Yeah, that’s it ain’t it.”

“None of your business.”

“Settle down, you two. We’ve got some planning to do. Now, this Maynard bloke. He disappeared for a week, but Vinny’s been going past each night to watch the place, and says he’s back, and he stayed there last night. So the chances are he’s gone back to living at the gaff. Vinny’s parked up near his house, and he’ll let us know when the bastard returns. This guy is slippery. So far he’s been dead lucky.”

“So once Vinny says he’s home we’ll go and we grab his old dears as an insurance policy and then go round and burn his fucking house down with him still in it. Then we do the pair of ’em, so there are no witnesses.”

“Yeah, great.”

“Sounds good to me.”

“Right. Let’s get everything ready. It’s going to be a long night. Lennox, go down to the end lock up and find those petrol cans and go and get them filled up. Don’t go to the supermarket; they’ll have CCTV of you buying the stuff. Go to Joey’s garage. I’ll give him a quick call, and he’ll sort it out.

* * *

At eleven thirty, Kevin and his two sons had been sitting in their 4x4 on Thornton Gardens, making sure no one was watching them. Once they were sure everything was quiet, they drove onto the drive of number seven. The three men got out of the vehicle. Tyson cut the phone wires that ran down the side of the house and Lennox made his way round to the back and used his glasscutter to take out a panel from the back door. He reached in and turned the key from the inside.

Followed by his brother and father, he crept along the hall until he reached the door where the loud snoring was coming from. The three men walked into the room, Tyson found the light switch and clicked it.

The two figures in the bed failed to notice. Nothing stirred.

“Rise and fucking shine!” shouted Lennox and then gave a loud laugh.

The pair sat up, Elsie rubbing her eyes, Vernon reaching for the glasses he kept on the bedside table.

As the glasses had the immediate effect of bringing everything into focus, Vernon saw the three men, one holding a baseball bat and another with a sledgehammer resting over his shoulder.

“Who are you? What do you want? We don’t keep much money in the house, but you’re welcome to it. About four hundred pounds, I think.”

“Oh yeah, we’ll be taking that for sure. But it’s you two old fogies we want.”

After giving them time to get dressed, Elsie and Vernon were bundled into the boot of the 4x4, which had been backed up to the front door.

Just before he put down the boot, Kevin leaned forward in a way that threatened menace. “No funny business and no heroics if you know what’s good for you.”

The boot slammed, and everything went dark.

BACK HOME

It felt good to be back in his home. Of course, everywhere Roger looked there were photographs to remind him of his beautiful daughter. Photos of her growing up, with her mum, her grandparents, her first pony, her first horse and lots of photos with her best friend, Sarah Parks. And of course, lots with her dad.

What do they say? A parent's worst nightmare is to have to bury their own child.

He had to come to terms with the fact Julie was gone.

Maybe the next day would bring a little more relief. Maybe!

The next day he would go over to 39 Cheney Way and clear out the things he had there and hand back the keys. Kevin O'Connor might not get his comeupance in this lifetime, but Roger was sure when the time came he would get it in the next.

It was 11.42 p.m. when Roger walked upstairs and got ready for bed. He was usually in bed by eleven, but he wasn't planning on going in to work the next day. In fact, if the deal with Clifton Engineering went through, and he had almost decided he would accept it, he would probably never go into work again. He would still take a couple of weeks before making the final decision, but his mind was virtually made up.

It hadn't been easy, but by midnight, Roger had cleared his mind and was finally asleep. In his current state, he had forgotten about setting the alarm system. So at one-thirty, he wasn't aware of the three figures hiding in the bushes to the rear of his house. And he didn't hear the petrol being poured through the spout from the 20-litre army-green metal petrol can and into his front letter box.

After the contents of the first can had finished being poured through the letterbox, Kevin picked up the second can and walked round the house, pouring petrol on every window seal he came to. Tyson had cut a hole through the glass panel of the back door, large enough for the spout of his petrol can to deliver its contents onto the kitchen floor. Lennox had another can and was pouring petrol around the large conservatory.

Once all three were happy with their handiwork, Kevin pulled out three rags and poured petrol over them from the small amount he had kept back.

Almost together the three men set fire to the back door, the conservatory, and Kevin put his rag through the letterbox and watched as the flames took hold along the hallway where the petrol had travelled.

Keeping out of site in the hedges at the front of the house, the trio admired their handiwork.

After ten minutes, the whole house looked to be ablaze. Kevin sent Tyson round to the back of the house to make sure the occupant didn't escape through the back door or conservatory.

Tyson carried one of the three baseball bats they had brought along. If by some miracle, Roger managed to escape the flames then he would be brought down with the bat and finished off.

Tyson was hoping he would escape and run his way. He loved hurting people. It always got his pulse racing.

Upstairs in his bedroom, Roger had woken up after hearing one of the the smoke detectors kick and then heard the loud bangs and crashes as items succumbed to the flames and either melted or exploded.

He cautiously opened the bedroom door and found the flames already creeping up the stairs and smoke restricting his view beyond about two metres.

He went back into the bedroom, took his dressing gown into the en-suite bathroom and put it in the bath and turned the cold-water tap of full power, making sure the water covered every part. Then he put it on over the pyjamas he was wearing and opened the door and made a dash along the hall to his daughter's bedroom. Once inside he closed the door. Without hesitation, he opened her walk-in closet and pressed a button on the back wall that opened a hidden door.

It was a panic room he had installed three years previously when Julie decided to dump her ex-boyfriend Craig Dawson, and after he had been released from prison after serving just three years of his six year sentence and he became a bit of a nuisance.

The house originally had five bedrooms, and there was only him and Julie, so he had people from his engineering company alter one of the bedrooms and install a safe room 'just in case' because at the time it looked like the boy could turn into a stalker.

Luckily, after a while, he got a new girlfriend and stopped standing outside the front of the house all night. And then the threats had ceased. By then the work had already been undertaken.

As his company specialised in metalwork engineering, everything in the hidden room had been lined with metal, and it included a staircase that led down into the basement and along and out to the triple garage to the side of the house.

The smoke was getting through, but the metal kept the flames at bay, although the walls were becoming hot. Roger covered his face and mouth with the dressing gown and felt his way down to the basement and then along to the garage. Luckily there was a short passage from the house, and the smoke and flames hadn't got to the garage yet.

Roger could hear sirens in the distance getting louder. He pressed the button on the wall to open the garage door, and when it had risen up enough, he clambered out into the front driveway. Just as he did, he saw two fire engines and a police car arriving in the driveway. He didn't notice Kevin

and his two sons standing in the crowd that had gathered to see what was going on, but they noticed him.

“C’mon, let’s get out of here,” said Kevin.

FIRE

Two fire engines filled the driveway at the front of Roger's house both with ladders extending towards the front of the house. Yellow fire hoses crisscrossed over each other like giant worms stretching to the back of the house where firemen fully rigged with breathing apparatus stood aiming each hose with total precision through the windows on both the ground and upper floors.

The noise levels from both the firefighters communicating with each other and the damage being created by the flames meant anyone within a hundred metres was probably not going to be able to sleep for some time.

There were around thirty neighbours and onlookers standing on the pavement and spilling into the road. A few even had their phones and were videoing the event like it was Guy Fawkes Night.

The fire officer had informed the two police officers of the safe distance to maintain, and they were standing to ensure none of the onlookers got too close.

The road either side of the house had been blocked off by police cars. Detective Eden Gold parked as close as he could, and together with his colleague DS Tracy Archer, walked to the front of the crowd, both showing the PC their ID badges.

Roger Maynard was sitting on a fold-up chair one of the firemen had grabbed from the garage and placed to the left side of the front garden about halfway between the fire engines and the road. He was being attended to by a paramedic.

As Eden spoke with the firemen, Tracy walked over to where Roger was sitting.

“Hello, Mr Maynard. Can you tell me what happened?”

Roger indicated his burning house. “Someone set fire to the house, with me in it, is what happened. And I think I can guess who that was.”

“I don’t suppose you saw them.”

“No. But it’s obvious, isn’t it?”

Eden sighed. “To you and me perhaps, but not to a jury. He will have an alibi with a dozen witnesses.”

“I thought he would forget about me.”

“Mr Maynard, off the record, I’ve been dealing with this family for more years than I care to remember and they are ruthless, especially Kevin. I don’t know what keeps the blood flowing round his body, but it’s sure not a heart because he hasn’t got one that I’ve ever seen. And I’m afraid this won’t be the end of it.”

“How does he get away with it?”

“We have to act within the law, and he knows how to play the system. Believe me, there are probably twenty cops who would give half their pension to see O’Connor locked up but unless we catch him in the act, we can’t touch him.”

Roger bit his lip. “I bloody can.”

“Sorry, I went deaf for a second there. I didn’t hear what you said. Just be careful, Mr Maynard, or you could be the one ending up in court. We’ll get him one day, believe me.”

“If I can get to my car in the garage, I’ve got some spare clothes. Plus I left my mobile in there.”

One of the two mobiles had been in the house, and Roger guessed that one would have been destroyed, but he had left the one with the number given to the police in his car. He didn’t mention to the detective about having two and the reason.

When the problems had first begun for Roger, one of the first things Phil Jones had advised Roger to do was purchase two mobile phones and to tell everyone he had lost his old one.

“You don’t know who is on your side. Give out the number of one phone to people like the police, your solicitor’s office and legal people. Then give out the second number to family and for work-related matters.

Now, we need to find you somewhere to stay.”

“I have somewhere I can stay that will be safe.”

“If you are sure? Not somewhere connected to your family, I hope. Once O’Connor learns you’ve survived he will try other ways.”

“There are only my parents and my ex-wife. No other family. My parents are due to go on holiday tomorrow so that they will be away for the next two weeks. I’ll warn Francis to be on her guard.”

“Okay. Just keep in touch and remember what I said. Don’t try to take the law into your own hands.”

The fire brigade managed to contain the fire. There was extensive damage, and no one was allowed into the house, but they did allow Roger to grab his clothes and mobile from his car but he couldn’t drive it as the fire engines were in the way and would remain there for some time. Due to the smoke damage, the car would probably need a visit to the main dealer before it was deemed safe to drive.

Roger selected a contact on his phone. “Can I have a taxi to the corner of Fieldview Lane please?”

“Certainly, sir. Where are you going to?”

“The Milton Motel.”

“Be there in five minutes.”

THE KIDNAP

“Hello, Phil Jones Investigations.”

“Hi Phil, it’s Roger Maynard. Someone burned my house down last night, while I was still in it.”

“Where are you now?”

“I’ve booked into the Milton.”

“Give me an hour, and I’ll come over. In the meantime ask Gerry if the meeting room is free.”

Roger was about to head out of his room when his phone rang. Although the number hadn’t been programmed into this phone he recognised his mother’s number.

“Hello, Mum, how did you get th—”

“You must be fucking Houdini.”

Roger froze at the sound of the voice on the other end. It was gruff... and the accent was Irish. There was silence for two seconds before the voice continued.

“I’ve got two people here who would like to speak with you.”

Roger went cold.

“Hello, Roger. It’s Mum. I’m sorry, son. We were asleep in bed and these men broke in and grabbed us. I’m not sure where we are. It’s a sort of—”

Roger heard a loud scream and someone in the background. “Mum, Mum!”

The phone went dead.

Roger dialled Phil Jones.

“Hello, Phil Jones Investigations.”

“Hello Phil, it’s Roger Maynard again. I just received a call from my mum. Then Kevin O’Connor came on the phone. He’s kidnapped my parents. Then when I spoke to Mum she tried to tell me where they were and I heard a loud scream then someone said something like, “You stupid bastard, you’ve hit her too hard”. Then the phone went dead.”

“Which phone did he call you on?”

“He called me on the number I only gave to the police. The other one was destroyed in the fire.”

“Did your mum or dad have that number?”

“No. I only gave them the family phone number.”

“Now you understand why I told you to get two phones. He wasn’t to know that, and neither was the person he’s got on the inside at the police station. This helps to confirm it.”

Suddenly Roger could see another call coming in. “Phil, I’ll call you back.”

“Hello.”

“Listen carefully. We’ll do an exchange. Your parents for £500,000 in cash.”

“I heard my mother scream. Is she okay?”

“She’s fine. Now listen—”

“No, you fucking listen. I want to speak to my mother. Now!”

“She can’t come to the phone.”

“Listen you bastard. I don’t care what you do with me. You made sure of that when you killed my daughter, but if I find you’ve also harmed my parents, I’ll come after you with everything I’ve got. Put her on the phone.”

“Okay. There was a little accident. But she’ll be fine.”

Then Roger recognised his dad, shouting away from somewhere in the background.

“They’ve killed her, son. They’ve killed your mum.”

“Shut up, old man.”

Roger heard Kevin O’Connor’s voice. “Tyson got a little carried away and accidentally hit her harder than he thought. But we’ve still got your dad. The choice is yours. We can do the exchange, or he can die a slow and very unpleasant death. How much is your father worth to you?”

“I’ll get the money. It’s not a problem. I just need some time. It will take me a couple of days to find that amount in cash without raising suspicion. But I warn you. Look after my father. Make sure nothing happens to him, or

you won't see a single penny. And how do I know you'll let him go after I hand over the money?"

"You have my guarantee."

"I wouldn't trust you any further than I could throw you."

"What choice do you have?"

DEAD MAN WALKING

Roger sat in the coffee lounge next to reception, waiting, when he saw Phil Jones' car pull up outside.

"Hello, Roger. Sorry, I got here as fast as I could."

"Thanks, Phil. I understand you must have other work on."

"Did you ask Gerry? Is the meeting room available?"

"Yes, he said we could use it."

Roger sat down at the table. Phil went over to a coffee machine.

"Sorry, dying for a coffee. I haven't stopped all morning. Would you like a cup?"

Both men sat facing each other.

Roger went through everything that had happened.

"Obviously I can't be seen to get involved in anything illegal," Phil replied, "and I wouldn't want to. However, seeing as we are dealing with the O'Connor clan, I can tell you, in my opinion, going down the normal route won't work. They've been running rings round the police for years. Kevin and his family don't give a fig for anyone except themselves."

"My advice is to involve the police and tell them about your parents, especially if, as you say, you suspect your mother has been killed. But I can't guarantee the outcome as I suspect your father is being held somewhere the police are not aware of and a place with no direct connection to Kevin."

"But if you're determined not to involve the police then off the record I'm going to suggest some things that are, shall we say, in the grey area. I could get into a lot of trouble, but this could be the only way you have a chance of seeing your father alive again. This is *totally* off the record. And

if it doesn't go according to plan you could end up dead alongside your father. But I have to be honest and say, where the O'Connors are concerned, you're probably already a dead man walking."

YELLOW SUBMARINE

Following the ‘off the record’ advice from Phil and after a lot of thought, Roger sat down in his room at the Milton Motel and dialled his mum’s number.

A voice he recognised as Kevin O’Connor answered with a gruff “Yeah.”

“I’ll do a swop for my father. I’ve already started to put things in place to raise the cash. But I need forty-eight hours. If you look after my father in a decent way and I get to speak to him just before the exchange, then we have a deal.”

“What about the police?”

“I haven’t spoken to them and I won’t. I think you know I’m not going to get them involved. You’ve taken virtually everything from me, my only daughter and my lovely mother. All I have left is my dad. I just want to make sure he’s safe at the end of this.”

“Two days it is. Your dad stays healthy until then. And no funny business.”

“That’s more your sort of thing. I play by the book, as you are aware. I’ll call you as soon as everything is in place.”

Roger dropped the phone by his side on the bed and put his hands over his face.

One chance. That’s all he had. If something went wrong, then his dad would be dead. The problem was, he knew even if he did the exchange, in all probability, O’Connor wouldn’t let his father walk free. He knew too much.

He had already checked the tracking devices he had attached to Kevin's 4x4 and the Transit van on his computer, but there was no signal. The batteries must have gone flat.

Suddenly his phone dinged with a text message from a withheld number.

'Fez club. Tomorrow night. 1 to 3 a.m., Park Street. Call 07239 445445. Yellow Submarine. Good luck.'

Roger dialled the number.

"Hello."

"I was given your number by an associate. He told me to say Yellow Submarine."

"So how can I help you?"

"I need to get my hands on a couple of special items not available in the shops, if you get my drift."

"Okay. Give me the details, and I'll see if I can help you."

* * *

The following evening at eight, Roger received another text from the withheld number.

'Received confirmation. Green light for tonight.'

At ten o'clock, Roger drove the 59-plate VW transporter van he had purchased for £3,000 into Park Street Car Park in a position where he could see each car as it drove in.

The two rear windows of the van had been covered with a one-way mirror film tint purchased from a local auto store. The instructions had made it quick and easy to apply. *"Once the mirror tint is applied to glass it will give a mirror finish from the outside whilst allowing clear vision from inside all in a colour of your choice. The self-adhesive backing allows easy fitting with the aid of a little soapy water."*

Forty minutes later, the car Roger had been waiting for appeared in the car park. It drove up the ramp where Roger had parked and continued to the third floor. Roger got out of his van and walked up the ramp to see where it had been parked on the far side against the wall. Once he saw the lone occupant make his way towards the exit stairs, he waited a couple of minutes and then went back to his van and drove it up to the third floor and

parked with the rear doors facing the back of the white BMW he had been observing.

Roger sat in the back of the van and waited. When he had parked, the third floor had about twenty cars parked but as time passed many of them were driven off until by 1 a.m., there was just a handful.

Roger heard the doors at the top of the stairwell open and watched as Tyson O'Connor walked towards his car. There was an unforeseen problem. He was not alone. Tyson had his arm around an attractive young lady.

Roger hesitated. He didn't want to harm anyone other than the scumbag he had come to get.

Should he, shouldn't he? He needed to make a move if he was to stand any chance of getting his father back safely.

Luckily, Tyson helped.

He walked the young lady round to the passenger side of the car and opened the door for her and then walked around the back of the car.

"I'm gonna take a quick piss," he informed the girl.

Tyson stood behind his car, looking down as he relieved himself.

Roger quietly opened the rear doors of the van and got out. He crept up behind Tyson, and as he heard something and turned, Roger zapped him with the Taser gun he had purchased illegally following the Yellow Submarine phone call.

Tyson sank unconscious to the ground like a sack of potatoes. Roger grabbed his hands and pulled a pair of police-issue handcuffs from his pocket, also supplied by Yellow Submarine, and made sure Tyson's hands were secure behind his back. He then put two long plastic ties around his legs and pulled them tight and lifted him into the back of the van. He placed a ski mask over his head and turned it 180 degrees, making sure Tyson's mouth was in line with the slit Roger had made in the back of the material, and so he couldn't see the route they would be taking if he gained consciousness.

As Roger drove away, he noticed the young lady get out of the car and walk around, trying to work out where her male partner had gone. Roger drove at normal speed to the exit and off into the night. So far there was no sound from the back, which either meant Tyson was still unconscious or pretending to be and biding his time.

Twenty minutes later, the silver coloured van turned into the narrow private driveway that led down to the premises of the equestrian centre

Roger had purchased and was going to give to his daughter at the evening party of her twenty-first birthday.

The van came to a halt, and taking no chances, Roger opened the back doors and stepped back while holding the Taser gun in one hand, a powerful torch in the other and a baseball bat on the floor close by as back up.

With no movement, he shone the torch into the van. Slowly the figure sat up. Roger could see the handcuffs and cable ties were still in place. He brought over a large trolley on wheels, the type used by garden centres to haul their plants around. The level was virtually the same as the floor of the van. He tied some rope around Tyson's legs and then hauled him from the van onto the trolley, making sure he was a few feet away at all times. He couldn't afford to underestimate what this person was capable of.

Once he was satisfied his prisoner was still secure, Roger pulled the trolley into the nearest of two metal shipping containers placed side by side that had originally been intended to store hay and feed for the horses but had never been used.

Once inside, Roger picked up the Taser and hit Tyson to ensure he would be in no fit state to attack him as he transferred him to the wooden slab he had prepared.

The slab consisted of a piece of solid oak about two metres high and one metre wide and as thick as a door. It was covered on one side with a thin layer of foam. The other side had four square metal plates, about eight inches square. Each one had a bolt attached that went through the wood and on to the side with the foam. Attached to the two lower bolts were metal bracelets that had been specially made to fit around both of Tyson's ankles. The two other plates had bracelets for his wrists. It would take the strength of an elephant to break any of the short chains. It was virtually upright against one side of the container.

After buying the oak, Roger had taken it to his engineering factory and together with a couple of his best employees, had added the items of hardware. They had shown surprise at the items but had not dared to ask their boss why he was constructing such a strange piece of apparatus.

Roger first cut the cable ties around Tyson's feet and placed the metal brackets around his ankles. Next, he took out the key and unlocked the cufflinks and transferred Tyson's wrists to the brackets and locked them.

Just to be sure, Roger then took a length of chain and placed it around Tyson's waist. Each side then went through a metal-rimmed hole on each

side of his body, which he then secured with a powerful padlock.

By the time Roger was satisfied his prisoner was secure, it was 2 a.m. He had been up for nearly twenty hours. He closed the doors to the metal container and padlocked it. The container had air holes, so he knew Tyson wouldn't die due to lack of oxygen. *More's the pity*, Roger thought.

THE EXCHANGE

The alarm Roger had set on his watch announced the time was midday.

His natural reaction was to check his phone, which he'd switched off before driving to the car park the previous night. He was aware the phone could be tracked, and as Phil Jones had reminded him on more than one occasion, the police believed Kevin O'Connor had someone on the inside, and that person might be able to find his location via the movement of his mobile phone.

He had slept in the other container. Earlier in the day, he visited the local furniture store and purchased a folding bed and brought it back in the VW van.

By 2 p.m., Roger had refreshed himself and eaten a meal, although he didn't feel too much like food, he needed to be alert and ready if he was going to make sure O'Connor didn't get the better of him.

Roger couldn't afford to make a mistake if he wanted to see his father alive.

He checked in on Tyson.

"You bastard. My father's going to cut you up into little pieces and feed you to the fish."

"From where I'm standing you're in no position to threaten me. You killed my mother. I would be extremely careful how you talk to me, or I might decide to do the same to you."

Tyson looked down and went silent.

Roger closed the doors to both containers and got into the van he had parked round the side and drove off until he reached the branch of Tesco's on the other side of Trentbridge and drove to the far side of the car park.

He dialled the number he had for Kevin.

"Yeah."

"How's my dad?"

"Fine and dandy."

"Let me speak to him."

"He's not here."

"What do you mean he's not there? What have you done with him?"

"Calm down. What I mean is I'm not at the place where he is enjoying our hospitality."

"Then phone me back when you are, and I'll tell you where your son Tyson was last night."

And with that, Roger hung up.

Let him sweat for a while, he thought.

An hour later, Roger's phone rang.

"Hello."

"Hello, son."

"Is that you, Dad? Are you alright?"

"Yes, son. I'm okay. Don't let these bastards try—"

Kevin's voice came on the phone. "See, I told you he was fine."

"You'd better keep him that way. If any harm comes to him, then Tyson gets the same."

"What are you on about?"

"Last night. I kidnapped your son. I'm holding him. He'll come to no harm as long as my father stays healthy. You understand?"

"No, no. My son is at home."

"I think you had better check before you say that. Last time I saw him he was securely tied up, as I'm sure you have done with my father. Oh, and when we meet for the exchange, you had better bring him a fresh pair of trousers. He's had an accident in the ones he's currently wearing."

"If you harm my son I'll kill you, you bastard."

"Now you're getting a taste of your own medicine. If you harm my father, I will kill **you**. I'll phone you later with a location to do the exchange. I'm in charge now if you want to see your son again."

Roger ended the call. That way he felt more in control, although he was shaking with fear.

He still had lots of work to do.

* * *

One hour later, Roger phoned Kevin.

“Ready to do an exchange? We’ll meet on the Milton Industrial Estate at units nine and ten. They are both currently unoccupied. Tonight at seven. You bring my dad, and I’ll bring Tyson and the cash. A straight exchange and no funny business.”

At seven o’clock, Roger drove into the industrial estate and parked up close to units nine and ten.

Kevin O’Connor was nowhere to be seen, but Roger had an idea he wasn’t far away.

He couldn’t see the black 4x4 vehicle parked on the hill that overlooked the estate and Kevin O’Connor watching him through binoculars. He had been there for the past two hours, after checking with his contact in the police but also double-checking by driving along all the nearby streets to make sure the police were not waiting for him.

He watched as Roger parked up. He could see someone in the front passenger seat of the car with what looked like Tyson’s trademark red Scuderia Ferrari cap. He saw Roger go to the boot and remove a large silver metal case, much deeper than a briefcase, the type used by photographers to keep cameras from getting damaged in transit. And large enough to hold £500,000 in cash.

Once Kevin was satisfied no one else was around, and there were no police hiding anywhere, he walked back to the vehicle. “Get off that fucking phone, Lennox. We’ve got work to do. Put the old geezer in the front seat.”

Lennox did as he was told and got into the back seat.

Kevin drove slowly into the industrial estate and along the first line of units and round the end units to bring his vehicle facing Roger’s Mercedes then backed away about five metres.

Roger stepped out of his car holding the silver case. “I’ve got your money. It’s all here. And I’ve got your son here” he said pointing to the figure sitting in the front passenger seat. “Let my father get out of the car, so I can see he’s alright.”

“Let Tyson go.”

“After what happened to my mother, not until I’ve seen my father is alright.”

Kevin beckoned to Lennox to bring Roger's dad from the car. "There yer go. Right as rain. He's been well cared for. Now throw over your car keys. And the cash."

"Roger did as he was asked and slid the case along to where Kevin was standing by the driver's door of his vehicle.

As he did, he noticed Lennox walk round to the back of the 4x4 and opened the boot.

The lid of the boot in the open position was above the roof of the vehicle, but through the back window, Roger noticed Lennox holding what looked like a baseball bat.

Kevin had opened the case and was occupied, picking up the bundles of cash. A big grin across his face. "Quick, Dad, run over here."

Vernon moved quickly and ran over to his son.

"Nice try. But I'm afraid we can't leave any witnesses. Tyson, get out of the car."

The figure didn't move.

"Tyson, get out of the fucking car."

Lennox walked round from the back of the 4x4 to where his father was standing. He was carrying a baseball bat. "I'm going to fucking enjoy this. By the time I've finished battering the fuck out of you, they'll only be able to identify you from yer fucking dental records."

Roger grabbed his father's hand and pulled him as he took a step back and opened the rear door of the Mercedes. He reached down to the floor just as Lennox rushed at him, the baseball bat high above his head and his eyes filled with rage.

Roger knew he had to make a move otherwise they would both be dead.

THE DUMMY

Lennox was three feet away from Roger. Another couple of steps and the bat would come down.

Roger aimed the Taser and fired, hoping it wouldn't let him down. Lennox stared at him as if he couldn't believe what had just happened then slumped to the floor, writhing in agony.

Kevin moved forward in a rage, dropping the case with the money and raising his fists.

Roger knew he didn't stand a chance in a fist fight, but he had to protect his father. He picked up the bat that lay near Lennox, and as Kevin came into range, Roger swung it at Kevin's legs.

He heard a loud crack as the solid wood of the bat struck Kevin across the side of his leg at knee height. Kevin screamed out in pain.

Roger noticed Lennox, still looking a bit groggy but starting to get back to his feet by leaning on the bonnet of the Mercedes.

Lennox looked across to the passenger seat.

"Tyson, what the fuck are you doing sitting the..." He stopped mid-sentence as he realised it wasn't his brother but a lifelike mannequin dummy wearing Tyson's trademark red Scuderia Ferrari Cap.

"Quick, come on, Dad."

Roger grabbed his father's hand and pulled him to the door of unit ten.

Once they were inside, Roger locked the door.

Unit 10 on the Milton Industrial Estate was the place where Roger had originally started his business twenty-four years earlier. He still rented it, partly for sentimental reasons, although nowadays it was used to house

another business he was involved in called Trentbridge Technology Training.

Roger led his father through the building to the door at the rear and then told him to get into the passenger side of the VW van he had parked there earlier, with Tyson securely tied up in the back.

Roger went over to the large roller shutter door and pressed a button to raise the door. Once it was clear of the van he got in and drove the van out. Then lowered the shutter door from the outside and took the key. He hopped into the driver's seat.

"Mmm. Mmm," said Tyson securely tied up in the back of the van with gaffer tape across his mouth and the ski mask covering his head.

Roger said nothing. He drove to the Milton Motel.

"Look, Dad. You'll be safe here. I've booked you a room. Here's the key. Stay here tonight, and I'll get back to see you in the morning. It's eight o'clock now; the restaurant is open until ten. Why don't you have a quick freshen up in your room and then enjoy a meal. I've got things to sort out."

"Be careful, son. They told me they would kill us both when they had me tied up. These are not nice people."

"Don't worry. I'll be careful. See you later."

Roger drove back to the equestrian centre. He was scared and worried about his dad's safety. He knew they wouldn't stop coming after him and his father. There was only one way to stop them. A way he hadn't really considered before but now he knew it was his only option. The only way out.

It was 10 p.m. when the VW stopped, and Roger got out to open the metal gates of the entrance. He drove through, stopped and locked the gates then drove the VW over to the two containers.

He opened the back doors and removed the ski mask over Tyson's head, then took the small pair of scissors from his pocket and cut the cable ties holding Tyson's legs. Then he reached over and pulled him upright and pulled the gaffer tape from his mouth.

"Where's my dad. Why am I back here?"

"Because your father and brother tried to double cross me. They were going to kill my father and me. So I'm going to send them a message. In the only language, they seem to understand. Come with me you piece of shit."

As he pulled him from the back of the VW and stood him up, Tyson lashed out with a karate kick, sending Roger backwards, hitting his head on

the metal container door. He lay dazed on the floor.

* * *

Tyson ran off into the darkness, his hands still in the handcuffs behind his back.

With a black overcast sky and no moon visible, he could hardly see where he was going. He just wanted to get away, to find a way of contacting his father. He had no idea what this place was or where he was.

He could make out a building in front of him. Perhaps there was a phone inside. Or some tools so he could get the damn handcuffs off.

He walked into what seemed to be a very wide hallway. He followed it along and felt the floor beneath him change from soft to hard. He walked on trying to make out any shapes, but that section of the building didn't seem to have any windows. He thought he heard a noise behind him? Maybe his captor wasn't badly injured and was coming after him.

Tyson moved faster; he glanced over his shoulder once more as he took a step forward and fell into what at first he thought was a hole. It was filled with water, and he had never learned to swim.

A DEAD MAN

It was thirty minutes before Roger came to. His head hurt, but the bleeding had stopped and there was no time to lose. He looked around, no sign of Tyson.

“Shit.”

Roger staggered to his feet. If he let Tyson get away, it could mean the end of everything. He could never stand up against Kevin and his two sons. They would hunt him and his father down. The words Phil Jones had spoken came to mind, *“Where the O’Connors are concerned I have to be honest and say you’re probably already a dead man walking.”*

* * *

Roger needed to find him. If Tyson’s father found out about the equestrian centre, he’d be there quickly, although Roger was pretty certain it wouldn’t be Kevin personally. The crack he’d given him with the baseball bat. He had taken enough first aid courses over the years to know he had probably broken Kevin’s leg.

Roger looked for his phone. He had left it in the VW. Was it still there or had Tyson found it and called his dad? No, it was still there. Tyson would be looking for a phone. So he would probably have gone into the equestrian centre and found the offices. The phones were connected. There was a slim chance Tyson hadn’t managed to get a message out yet.

Roger ran over to the front door of the centre and opened it. He crept along the stable run. He knew Tyson could jump out at any moment and

overpower him. He tried to be quiet so he could hear any sound of Tyson, but everything was still. No noise. In the dark, Roger couldn't see much but luckily he knew the layout.

He walked around to the main office. The door was still locked with no sign of forced entry. Where was Tyson? Was he hiding or had he just kept running until he found the main road and then tried to flag down a passing motorist?

Roger decided to go back to the VW and drive around and see if he could pick him up before an unsuspecting motorist did.

As he walked round the stables for a quick look, he spotted the figure face down in the swimming pool.

He rushed over, jumped in and swam over. He pulled Tyson from the water and using his experience of first aid and resuscitation, Roger tried to revive him.

It took twenty-two minutes before he was too exhausted to keep going. Tyson was dead.

There was only one thing Roger could do. He needed to tell Kevin O'Connor. Of course, he wouldn't believe it was an accident, but it was the right thing to do.

It was late at night. No good could come of telling Kevin O'Connor about his son so late. Besides, he was probably at the hospital getting his leg seen to. He needed to get some rest, and he would call him in the morning.

He carried Tyson's body to the freezer unit that had been installed to keep the feed for the horses. He was exhausted, and then walked outside to the container and spent the night on the folding bed.

The next morning, he woke up at seven. He wasn't looking forward to telling Kevin, but it needed to get it done.

He dialled the number.

"Hello."

Roger recognised his gruff voice.

"It's Roger Maynard. Look, I'm sorry to tell you this but there's been an accident. Tyson's dead. He knocked me out and ran off last night and drowned in a swimming pool. My condolences."

"This is a joke, right. You're trying to wind me up. What's your game?"

"I can assure you this is no joke. I'm not that sick. It was an acc—"

The line went dead.

* * *

Roger's dad Vernon had spent the night at the Milton Motel and came down for breakfast, feeling a lot better.

He didn't know where his son was and the phone calls he had made had gone unanswered.

He decided to call the only person he knew might be able to help.

He had always got on with Francis, Roger's ex-wife. To an extent he had understood why she had gone off with someone else. Over the years, Roger had concentrated on building up his business, and his marriage had suffered as a result. He and his wife had often arranged to go over to the house for a family meal, only to find when they got there that Roger was stuck at work. They had been very hands-on grandparents. Roger was their only son, and therefore Julie had been their only granddaughter, and they had adored her. So Francis and Roger's parents had built up a special bond over the years.

Vernon dialled her number.

"Francis, it's Vernon. There's been a spot of trouble. I'm staying at the Milton Motel. I don't want to go over it on the phone. I wondered if you were free to come and visit me for a chat. It's about Roger."

"Of course. I've not a lot on today. Is Elsie with you?"

Vernon didn't want to break the news over the phone that his wife had been killed. "No. Not at the moment."

"I can tell something's upset you. I've just got to drop something off at the post office and then I'll be right over."

THE COFFEE LOUNGE INCIDENT

As Francis got in her car and turned left out of her driveway, she didn't pay any attention to the tatty old dark blue Vauxhall Corsa that started following her.

After stopping at the post office, she drove to the Milton Motel and parked at the front. The Corsa drove around the side and parked up. As she walked into reception, she was unaware of the eyes that didn't let her out of their sight.

Builders had just finished the refurbishment of the front of the hotel. The reception area had been updated and an extension added for a new coffee lounge so that the old coffee lounge at the rear could be turned into a restaurant and conference facility.

Roger's dad sat in the new coffee lounge near the entrance and looked out for Francis. As she arrived, he got up and went to greet her. She kissed him on the cheek, and they hugged. They then walked through to the corner table where Vernon had been sitting.

Vinny Watkins was Kevin's cousin and had worked for him for the past eight years, between stints in prison, doing odd jobs and generally treated like a piece of crap. He had witnessed first hand the brutality of Kevin and his two sons. But he was loyal. Kevin had taken him in when he'd had nowhere to live. Now he had a small caravan at the rear of the Two Oaks Caravan Park next to the O'Connor residence. It wasn't much, but it was a roof over his head. Kevin didn't pay him much unless it was a 'special job' where he needed him to keep his mouth shut about what he had witnessed. But other than a few quid for rollups and a few pints, he didn't need much.

Once Vinny spotted Roger's dad coming to greet the lady he had been tailing, Vinny walked back to his car and phoned Kevin.

"Kevin, I was watching the ex-wife's house, like you told me. I've followed her to the Milton Motel. And she's met up with the old man you had hidden at the farm. What do you want me to do?"

"Stay around and watch them. Call me if they leave."

* * *

Nothing frightened Kevin O'Connor. Nothing that was, apart from his wife, Sadie.

He knew in his heart of hearts the news he had been given by Roger Maynard was true. Tyson was dead.

Now he had to tell his wife. It was never going to be a good time.

She wasn't due to visit him in the hospital until the afternoon, but he needed to tell her now. Just in case Roger told her. If the news came from anyone else, it didn't bear thinking about.

He dialled her number.

"Sadie. I've got some bad news. Prepare yourself for the absolute worst."

"What are you on about?"

"That bastard Roger Maynard has killed him. Tyson's dead. He drowned him in a swimming pool. Our son is dead."

"Where is he, this fucking Roger Maynard?"

"I don't know. But his father is at the Milton Motel with Roger's ex-wife. Vinny's there keeping an eye on them, but there's no sign of Maynard. I guess he's in hiding somewhere else. But we'll get him. Believe me, we'll get him."

* * *

No one took any notice of the white Mercedes as it sped into the car park of the Milton Motel. At first glance, the driver looked like any typical woman in her mid-forties. She parked the car, got out. Totally focused, walking in a straight line towards the front of the hotel.

The driver of the Ford Mondeo leaving had to stop abruptly to avoid hitting her. Another stupid woman, who didn't bother to look to the side, that's what the driver of the vehicle thought at first.

As he beeped, she kept walking unfazed, and merely turned her head and looked directly at him. He saw the fury in her eyes. He wouldn't dare to beep again. Especially when he noticed the six-foot tall young man in a hoodie walking a step behind her.

Having heard the car beep, Gerry Payne glanced up from the couple he was serving with cappuccinos in the café.

He watched as the automatic entrance doors opened as if to announce her arrival as Sadie walked into the reception area with Lennox in tow.

She turned left and strode towards the coffee lounge.

Gerry had his eyes on her. He was cleaning a table and just six feet from where Francis and Roger's dad were sitting deep in conversation and unaware of their approaching guests.

Gerry noted them both, but it was Sadie who took his attention. His instinct told him the lady was trouble. He could see it in her eyes. It was almost like a red beam fixed on the two people sitting at the table in the corner. He may have retired from the police force but all his years of training kicked in. What was more she seemed familiar even if she was attempting a disguise by wearing a cheap blonde wig. All his years of experience, he knew something was about to happen. But even this didn't prepare him for what was to come.

As Sadie walked towards the table, Gerry watched as she put her hand into the black handbag slung over her left shoulder. He spotted the hand gun in the split second as she brought it out of the bag.

As Sadie raised her arm and aimed at Francis to shoot, Gerry didn't hesitate and jumped in front of the intended target. The bullet entered his shoulder as the force flung him backwards against a nearby pillar.

Lennox was standing next to his mother and reached forward to grab Roger's dad.

"This is for my Tyson, you fucking bitch!" Sadie bellowed at Francis as Sadie raised the weapon for the second time.

With his arm covered in blood, Gerry hurled himself at Sadie once more, knocking her aim to the side as the gun went off with another loud bang.

Panic filled the coffee lounge.

Gerry quickly got to his feet and swiped his fist across Sadie's face. The gun slid from her hand and across the floor. Gerry's wife Paddy coolly picked it up and pointed it at Sadie. Keeping the gun aimed at her, Paddy walked slowly backwards to the reception desk, picked up the phone and dialled 999.

"We need police with an armed response unit and two ambulances," said Paddy to the operator.

"C'mon, Lennox. Let's go. She won't shoot us," said Sadie, all the time fixing her stare on Paddy who still had Sadie's gun pointed at her.

"Mum. I'm hit."

HERO'S HOTEL

Sadie looked down for the first time noticing Lennox was on the ground with blood coming from his stomach. The second bullet had hit him.

Sadie rushed over.

One of the people who had been sitting on the opposite side of the coffee lounge came over. "I'm a doctor. Let me have a look at him."

Gerry Payne staggered over to where his wife was standing by the reception desk.

"Paddy, I'll take the gun. Get Marie to fetch the first aid kit from the office."

Marie, the part-time receptionist, froze until she heard Paddy shout at her.

“Marie, do what Gerry says. Grab the first aid kit from the office.”

Within three minutes, the police had arrived, closely followed by the first ambulance.

Sadie was handcuffed and arrested. Medics went to attend to Gerry and Lennox.

“I think it would be a good idea if I took that, don’t you?”

One of the police officer stood in front of Paddy and held open a plastic evidence bag .

Paddy nodded and did as he requested.

The second ambulance arrived, and the medics rushed in.

Within two minutes, both ambulances rushed off, Gerry in one and Lennox in the other.

As the vehicles left the car park, an unmarked police car with its blue lights still flashing pulled in and parked by the entrance.

Out stepped DI Eden Gold and his colleague DS Tracy Archer, just in time to see Sadie O'Connor being led away to the nearby police vehicle.

Eden walked over to one of the two uniformed police officers who were already on the scene and held up his ID. "What have we missed?"

"It appears the woman walked in with a gun and fired at a couple sitting in the corner. The owner appears to have stopped the intended victim from being killed by jumping in front of the bullet. A bloody hero, according to a lady who witnessed the whole thing. The woman then tried to shoot again, and the owner stopped her, and the shot hit a young man who came in with the shooter. He was hit in the stomach. He's on his way to the hospital, and so is the hotel owner."

Once all the witness statements had been gathered, Paddy led the two detectives to the main office and gave them a backup copy of the CCTV showing the incident as it had taken place.

Tracy, ending a call, said, "Paddy, I've just heard from the hospital. Gerry's going to be okay. It will take a few weeks of recovery, but he should be as good as new. Just be prepared, once the newspapers get wind of what's happened you'll get bombarded. He's a hero for saving that lady."

"You worked with him so you both know what he's like. He's always been the same. Act first, think about safety later."

"Yes we know what he's like, Paddy. He was a great copper. Maybe you should rename the place Hero's Hotel."

“Oh God no. That would only encourage him. We bought this place to get away from all of that. But the way he studies every customer, I’m not sure he thinks he never left the force.”

Eden and Tracy made their way back to Trentbridge police station.

Sadie O’Connor had been booked in and was being held in the police cells.

“Let’s go and have a coffee and prepare some notes and then we’ll take her in for an interview.”

“That should be fun. I bet the first thing she asks for is a brief.”

“Her husband is in the hospital with a broken leg. And Lennox is there as well. That just leaves Tyson. I expect he’s out there somewhere plotting, but I don’t see how she’s going to talk her way out of this one. All those witnesses and the high-quality CCTV. I think we’ve got an iron-clad case for attempted murder.”

“Yeah. Shame we can’t get the whole family off the streets.”

“One good thing. Once we arrest her, we’ll have a chance to search the house. I wonder what goodies we’ll find in there. This could be the lucky break we’ve been hoping for all these years. Finally, we might get the chance to put at least one of the O’Connor clan behind bars for a good few

years. Give the population of Trentbridge a well-earned rest from the mayhem.”

Twenty-five minutes later, Sadie was escorted into interview room one by two uniformed police officers.

“Hello, Sadie. Please take a seat.”

Eden started the tape.

“Interview with Sadie O’Connor at Trentbridge police station. The time is three forty-two p.m. Those present are DI Eden Gold, DS Tracy Archer, Sadie O’Connor and her lawyer Alannah Vale. I would remind you, Sadie that you are still under caution. You have waived your rights for a solicitor to be present at this time. Can you confirm this for the tape please?”

“Yeah. That’s right.”

“Good. Now would you like to talk us through the events that happened at the Milton Motel earlier today?”

“Yeah. I went out for a coffee, and someone attacked me. So I defended myself.”

“Really. The witnesses and CCTV we have seem to show a different story. We can clearly see you walking into the coffee lounge of the Milton Motel

and pulling out a gun.”

“No, that’s not me. Look, she has blonde hair and I have dark hair.”

“For the purpose of the tape, I’m showing Sadie a blonde wig that was recovered at the scene. When we send it to the forensics lab I expect we’ll find a lot of your hairs attached on the inside.”

“Yeah, of course you will. You’ll get some of mine and put them there. You’ll stitch me up just like you always try to do with my family.”

“We don’t do that sort of thing Sadie, as you well know.”

“Now, the CCTV clearly shows you with the gun with the intention of shooting someone and the owner of the hotel jumping in front of your potential target to save her.”

“Serves the bastard right.”

Eden ignored the comment and went on. “It then shows you aiming at her again, but this time the owner knocks the gun from your hand to one side, resulting in you accidentally shooting your own son, Lennox. Then the owner knocks the gun out of your hand, and his wife picks it up and calls the police who arrive on the scene and arrest you.”

“Naw. That’s bullshit. I know nothing about all that. I just went there for a quiet coffee. If I’d known it was going to lead to this I would’ve stayed at home.”

“Sadie, we have the CCTV, we have the gun which I’m sure will have your fingerprints, we have the hand swabs that will show powder residue from you firing the gun and we have witnesses, lots of them. There’s no getting away from this. We’ll be charging you with attempted murder.”

“It’s a lie. Nothing to do with me. I’m saying nothing more.”

“Okay, Sadie, that’s your right. But it will harm your defence.”

“Go and fuck yourself.”

“I think we’re finished here. You’ll be taken back to your cell while we prepared the documents but be in no doubt, Sadie, in a few minutes we’ll take you through to the custody suite where you’ll be charged with attempted murder and possession of an unauthorised firearm. Take her away.”

The two police officers escorted Sadie back to her cell.

After all these years, it seemed like the police were finally getting somewhere in catching the O’Connor family.

THE FULL STORY

Roger Maynard wasn't sure what he should do. Should he report Tyson's drowning or not?

If he did and was arrested, would Kevin O'Connor be able to get to him? Roger wasn't clued up on these things but he'd heard about prisoners on remand being found dead in their cells. He recalled seeing a programme on TV recently where a prisoner had been found hanged in his cell and they proved there was no way he could have done it himself.

For now, Roger had put Tyson's body into the large commercial freezers that had been installed for the restaurant that formed part of the centre. He had also emptied the swimming pool so that no one else would fall in.

He had to decide his next move. He was about to phone the police and report Tyson's death when his phone rang.

"Hello, son. There's been an incident at the motel. Some woman, I think she was the wife of that thug who kidnapped your mother and me, she came here and tried to kill Francis and me."

"Are you both alright?"

"Yes. The man who runs the hotel jumped in the way and got shot in the shoulder. Otherwise, I think Francis would be dead. He's in hospital, but they say he'll be alright. The police caught the woman and her son who she accidentally shot."

"What was Francis doing there?"

"I called her because I was worried about you. With your mum gone, Francis is the only family I've got, apart from you, so after everything that happened I asked her over for a chat."

"Okay, look. Stay there and I'll be over as soon as I can."

Twenty-five minutes later, Roger arrived at the Milton Motel. He could see the area the police had cordoned off where the shooting had taken place. It was covered with men in white suits on their hands and knees searching every inch of the floor.

At the entrance was what looked like a temporary sign saying 'coffee lounge' and an arrow pointing to the side of the hotel where Roger knew the old one had been situated.

He walked in and saw his father and ex-wife sitting at one of the rear tables. "Are you both alright?"

"Yes, we're fine. I expect the shock will kick in later but thanks to the bravery of the hotel owner, we're okay."

Over the next few minutes, they went through all the details.

Then Vernon said, "I think I'm going for a lie-down, son. It's been a bit exhausting."

"Yes, of course, Dad. It'll give Francis and me a chance to catch up on things."

Then it was Roger's turn to break the bad news. "I witnessed them killing someone. They wanted me dead. That's why they kidnapped Mum and Dad. They wanted to do an exchange for me. But something happened and Mum got killed."

"Oh my God. No!" Francis grabbed his hand. "This can't be happening. Haven't these people done enough to us? What sort of animals are they?"

Roger waited while Francis composed herself. Then went on.

"Dad hasn't told me the full story yet. I expect he's still dealing with the shock. I was sure they'd try to kill us all and as it turned out I was right. But luckily Dad and I managed to get away. I was holding one of their sons as a hostage to bargain with. But something happened. I had him at the equestrian centre I bought for Julie. When I was moving him, he knocked me out and escaped, but he fell into the horses' swimming pool and drowned."

"What have the police said?"

"That's the problem. I haven't reported it yet."

"You have to."

"I know, but I need to work out a few things first. You've just witnessed what these people are capable of. They kidnapped my parents, killed Mum, and they were going to kill Dad and me. If I'm in prison, who's going to

protect you and Dad? That's my concern. I'm not bothered what they do with me. I just need a bit of time to figure things out."

"I know you, Roger. You're the most decent man I have ever met, but you need to involve the police in this."

"I will. I just need a little time."

Roger walked out of the coffee lounge and round to his car. Deep in thought he paid no attention to the tatty dark blue Vauxhall Corsa that had been sitting in the car park for the past two hours.

Vinny Watkins had already been on the phone to Kevin O'Connor. It was his third phone call to the man he called boss. "Kevin, I'm still at the Milton Motel. That Roger bloke turned up a while ago. Looks like he's leaving. What do you want me to do?"

"Follow the bastard. Don't fucking lose him. I want to know where he goes."

"You can count on me, Kevin. You know you can."

Twenty minutes later, Vinny watched as Roger got out of the VW and unlocked the metal gates to the Equestrian Centre and drove the vehicle through and then got out and re-locked the gates.

"Hello, Kevin. I followed him to a place called JM Equestrian Centre. It's on Shelford Road on the other side of Trumpington."

"Good work, Vinny. If he's just gone in there, he probably won't come out for a while. Go and stock up with food and drink then go back and watch that place like a hawk. I want to know everything he does. If he leaves, follow him. I want that bastard, Vinny. Don't you let me down. You hear me?"

"Got it, Kevin. If I have to stay all night, I've got a blanket in the boot. I'll keep you updated. How are you, boss? What do the doctors say?"

"My leg's broken. They say it will take six to eight weeks, but I'll be able to walk with crutches."

"As soon as he moves, I'll let you know, boss."

"Good lad, Vinny."

* * *

Quentin Reeves had been the head surgeon at Trentbridge Hospital for the past four years. He was a skilled doctor who always stayed calm under

pressure and did his best. However, the young man who had been brought in with a gunshot wound to the stomach was giving him cause for concern. Lennox O'Connor had been taken to the operating theatre straight from the ambulance.

The doctor had assessed his injury.

"How is he, Doctor?" asked the police officer sent to guard Lennox.

"Not good. The bullet entered his stomach on the left side and has sliced through his portal triad, that's the arteries and veins that supply the liver. It's not going to be easy. Now if you'll excuse me I need to attend to him."

After nearly four hours of surgery and fifty units of blood later, the young man was still bleeding and things were not looking good. Doctor Reeves had done everything he could and was getting more concerned by the minute.

* * *

At Trentbridge police station, the initial interview with Sadie O'Connor had ended, and Sadie had been returned to her cell, when Tracy Archer's phone rang.

"What? You're sure. No, that's okay. I'll handle it. Leave it with me, and I'll get back to you."

She went over to her colleague DI Eden Gold. "Eden, I just got a phone call from the hospital. Lennox died on the operating table. It seems there were complications. I need to tell Sadie."

"Want me to come with you?"

"No, I think woman to woman is best. She wouldn't want to look weak in front of a man."

TRACY'S FATHER

Tracy walked down to the cells where Sadie was being held.

The custody sergeant, Owen Franks, opened the door and let Tracy into the cell, waiting just outside with the door slightly ajar.

“Sadie. I’m sorry to be the bearer of bad news. I’ve just received a message from the hospital. They did their very best but I’m afraid there was a complication, and Lennox died on the operating table.”

From her training, Tracy knew the best thing was to say nothing. To allow the news to register with the person hearing it.

“No, you’re lying. This is some sort of trick, right. First Tyson and now Lennox. No, you bitch, just because of your father and what happened to him you’re trying to wind me up. You just want revenge for your dad. Well, I’m not giving you the satisfaction. I don’t believe you. Not my Lennox. My lovely boy. Lennox is fine. Lennox is fine. He’s alive. Get out. Fucking get out and leave me alone.”

“What do you mean first Tyson? Has something happened to him we’re not aware of? And what do you know about my father, Sadie?”

“I know what happened to him. I know everything. But I’m not telling you a fucking thing. Not when you try to trick me with lies about Lennox. And what are you trying to say? You don’t know about that bastard Maynard? He killed Tyson. Drowned him. He’s still got Tyson’s body. I want it back. I want to bury my son. Find his body, and I’ll tell you about your precious father. Until then, fuck off and leave me alone. Go on, fuck off.”

Tracy walked out of the cell, and the custody sergeant closed the door and locked it.

“I think she’ll be alright, but best keep an eye on her.”

Tracy walked back up to the first floor and into the CID offices and over to Eden’s desk.

“I’ve just told Sadie about Lennox. She said ‘First Tyson and now Lennox’. And she said, ‘Don’t tell me you don’t know about that Maynard bastard’. Do we have any news on something happening to Tyson?”

“No. Not that I know of.”

“She also mentioned my father.”

“Your father. You think the O’Connors had something to do with his disappearance? When did he go missing?”

“Just over eight years.”

“I guess it’s possible they were involved. I read in the files the O’Connor’s moved to Trentbridge twelve years ago. Do you know if he was investigating them when he disappeared? Do you think there’s a connection?”

“When it comes to that family nothing would surprise me. We got word this morning that the Irish Garda thinks they are linked to a drugs syndicate. We’ve suspected they are involved with drugs, but we’ve never been able to find how they’re bringing the goods in. I know the drugs squad spent two months watching every vehicle journey they made and never found a thing.”

“With Sadie under arrest, when are you planning to search the house?”

“Not until a couple of days after Lennox’s funeral. To go in now would cause a riot. We’d have every traveller with fifty miles descend on us. Tough as it is to wait, we need to show some respect. But we can make a visit to see Kevin.”

* * *

The following day, Eden and Tracy drove to the O’Connor residence.

Across from the main house, they saw a bonfire.

“What’s that for, burning evidence?” asked Tracy.

“No. It’s for Lennox. A bonfire at the home when someone dies, it’s a traveller tradition. Lennox’s coffin must already be in the house.”

Tracy knocked at the front door. She waited then knocked again.

“Fucking hang on. I’m coming.”

The door opened, and the two detectives were surprised to see Kevin on crutches with his leg in plaster.

“I suppose you’ve come to gloat.”

“You know us better than that, Kevin. We may not see eye to eye, but we have never treated you with anything other than respect and fairness. Now may we come in?”

Kevin turned on his crutches and walked away. “Shut the door and take your shoes off.”

The two detectives followed him into the living room. As with the other times they had visited, the house was spotless. Not a single thing out of place. The travelling community might have a reputation for fly-tipping and leaving huge piles of rubbish behind after illegally occupying a site but inside their own homes are always pristine. Cleaner than most five-star hotels.

“What are you here for then?”

Tracy spoke. “When I gave Sadie the news about Lennox she said ‘First Tyson and now Lennox’. Has something happened to Tyson?”

“He’s away on a couple of weeks’ holiday with some mates. He’s fine.”

“So what did she mean when she said she wanted his body back to bury him? She mentioned the name Maynard. I assume she means the gentleman whose daughter was killed in the hit and run.”

“How the fuck would I know what she’s on about? I expect she got confused, that’s all.”

“There is one other thing. She said I told her about Lennox because I just wanted revenge for my dad. You know who my dad was, don’t you.”

“Of course I do. Our paths crossed a few times. He was a fair man.”

“So what did she mean?”

“Come back and see me in a couple of weeks and I might be able to tell you a little more. What I can say is that his disappearance had nothing to do with us. Over the years I have heard rumours, but that’s all.”

“You swear you had nothing to do with it.”

“I’ll swear on a stack of fucking bibles if you like. I had nothing to do with it. Why would I? He wasn’t investigating me. You need to look closer to home. That’s all I’m saying for now.”

“Okay, we’ll see ourselves out, Kevin. Our sincere condolences over Lennox. Could we pay our respects to him?”

“I’m sure he would appreciate that.” Kevin stood up with the aid of his crutches and showed them through to the next room. In the middle was a stand with a beautifully ornate white coffin with silver handles. All around the room were candles burning.

“When is the funeral?”

“The day after tomorrow to allow time for family to come across from Ireland.”

After spending a few minutes, Tracy and Eden said goodbye and left the house.

As they got into the car Tracy commented.

“We may not agree with the way they conduct themselves to the outside community, but you have to respect them when it comes to family.”

“I know what you mean. We’ll have to keep a low profile but we need to be present at the funeral. If Tyson doesn’t attend then something is wrong. There’s no way on earth he would miss it, even if he is in the middle of a holiday. Things don’t add up here and we need to find out what’s going on.”

THE FUNERAL

Two days later, Trentbridge was brought to a halt when the funeral procession for Lennox as it made its way to St Paul's Catholic Church.

Over 100 mourners watched as a white Mercedes hearse carrying the coffin arrived, followed by a fleet of eight white Rolls Royce Phantom cars to give Lennox O'Connor a lavish send-off. A red carpet had been laid from where the hearse stopped all the way to the entrance to the church.

The white coffin with silver handles and photos of Lennox inside silver frames was carried by eight smartly dressed pallbearers into the church.

Kevin O'Connor, still using his crutches and escorted by his wife Sadie – who had been granted special permission to attend the funeral by a judge – made their way behind the coffin followed by a large procession of expensively dressed mourners. Members of the family and friends from across the travelling community. Most of the men wore handmade suits some wore black shirts and wraparound sunglasses, while many of the women wore high heels and expensive attire. Rolex watches, flash jewellery and genuine top-brand designer handbags and dresses costing into the thousands were prevalent.

The outside of the church was festooned with floral tributes and poster-size photos erected on stands left by relatives and friends.

It was a lavish emotional send-off. And obvious that absolutely no expense had been spared.

Over sixty police officers had been drafted in to keep control and DI Eden Gold and DS Tracy Archer joined the mourners in their capacity of keeping track of Sadie, but also to see if Tyson made an appearance. She

would be allowed to attend the church service and burial but not the wake that would follow.

According to an article in the Trentbridge Times newspaper, an insider had revealed the flowers alone had cost over £50,000 and the total for the funeral had been ‘just short of half a million pounds’.

It quoted the chief undertaker, who didn’t want to be named but said, ‘I’ve organised quite a few large funerals in my time, but nothing on this scale.’

The article went on to say that the police had called on pubs and local businesses to warn them to shut early.

The travellers had planned a celebration of Lennox’s life into the early hours of the morning at a secret location.

The newspaper also mentioned the large amount of trouble and damage caused at the wake. Four people were arrested but later released without charge.

A special Facebook page paying tribute to Lennox O’Connor had been set up where over two hundred messages had been posted.

Following the article, the online edition the newspaper received a large number of comments:

I don’t think you can blame anyone for disliking gypsies – It’s childish to compare them to any other racial group. They are just criminals who hide behind the law when it suits, hate all the gorgeas [non gypsies, who they consider fair game for criminality and violence], and break the law when it suits them – which is all the time. I expect Mother Teresa would have hated the gypsies and wished a plague on them. If they had lived next door to her they would have nicked her shrubs and pooped in her garden. Not so much a different race of humans – more a different species through persistent interbreeding from a thankfully very small gene pool.

But of all the comments in the newspaper the one that got the most response was the one that simply said:

‘Truly a great loss for the UK.’

THE FARM

“Hello, Kevin. It’s Vinny. Just calling in with news on our friend. It looks like another day of following his daily routine.”

“Okay. Listen, Vinny. I’m going to call Davy at the farm and get him to check over the box. When we take our friend for a ride. You stay where you are until midnight. I need to make sure we don’t lose that bastard. Then go home and get some rest and meet us at the farm at six.”

“Sure, Kevin.”

Kevin dialled a number on his mobile. “Davy. I’ve got a special job. Some rubbish I need to dispose of.”

Davy knew exactly what Kevin meant. “No problem, Kevin. Just tell me where and when.”

“Check over the horsebox and be ready to be on the move tomorrow. Make sure it’s filled with diesel and check the tyres and lights. We don’t want to get stopped because something’s not working. I need it all to be ready to go for early tomorrow. Vinny and I will be at the farm at six.”

“You can rely on me, Kevin.”

Situated just outside of town on the Stonebridge Road and set back behind a row of trees was Grainger’s Farm. A small property of six acres that Kevin O’Connor had bought nine years earlier, although he used an Irish cousin’s name on all the paperwork. The property looked run down, but deceptively, one of the barns had been restored and made extremely secure. In the early years, it was used as a place to hide stolen vehicles until they could be moved on or cut up for spares. Since then its main purpose had been to store drugs. The farm was situated about a mile downstream from Kevin’s house and on the opposite bank of the river. It was the place

where Kevin had held Roger's parents, and his mother's body was in a shallow grave, awaiting its final journey to a plot in the middle of a field that held a lot of other secrets that had been 'stored there' over the years.

Vinny and Davy were both distant cousins of Kevin. He had given each of them a home when they had needed one after being released from prison for petty crimes. Vinny lived in a caravan on the Two Oaks Caravan Park. Davy lived at the farm and looked after the three dogs that were kept as a deterrent for unwelcome visitors. Both men also did odd jobs for Kevin and helped out with his dodgy deals. They also kept an eye on the slave workers that Kevin used who were kept in locked sheds at the back of Kevin's property.

* * *

It was 5.50 a.m., as Kevin drove into the courtyard at the farm. He still had his left leg in plaster, and luckily his car was an automatic. He was pleased to see Vinny and Davy already there. As usual, Davy had a roll-up hanging from the corner of his mouth. Vinny was sipping tea from a mug. Kevin knew it might contain a small drop of whiskey but not enough to be over the limit for driving.

After a few words to explain what they were doing, they all got into the vehicle Davy had prepared and set off.

Thirty minutes later, Vinny pulled up at the gates to JM Equestrian Centre and got out and went over to the gates and using large bolt cutters, he broke the chain attached to the lock and threw it into a nearby hedge. Then he got back into the vehicle and drove along the path towards the main building.

Roger had moved the folding bed from the container to inside the main building and into one of the offices.

He was awoken by the sound of an approaching vehicle.

When he looked out of the window, he saw a horsebox coming up to the front of the building and stopping. A man got out and looked around as if he was lost.

Roger walked out, looking a little suspicious. "Can I help you?"

"Hello, I've just moved to the area, and I saw the sign for the equestrian centre and stables, and I'm looking for somewhere to keep my daughter's

horse.”

“How did you get through the gates? We’re not open for business.”

“They were open. I just drove in.”

Roger thought for a second. He was certain he had locked the gates, but maybe he was mistaken, with everything that was going on. “No, I’m sorry. We’re not open and can’t take in any horses.”

“Okay, I’ll find somewhere else. The back doors of the horsebox have come loose and it takes two people to fix it. I don’t want to drive around with it like that. Would you mind giving me a quick hand?”

“Yes, of course, no problem.”

Roger thought it strange. The horsebox looked almost new. He recognised it as an Oakley Super Sport horsebox. He had looked at buying one for Julie but thought before he bought one he would let her choose the colour. He knew it had two stalls and all the latest gadgets.

Before Roger had moved, Vinny quickly walked round to the back of the horsebox and opened the two doors. As Roger walked round and looked inside, he caught a glimpse of Kevin sitting on a chair. He noticed the Taser aimed at him, but it was too late.

“Two can play at your game,” Kevin said as he aimed and fired.

“Quick, tie him up and get him in the back,” Kevin said as he carefully climbed down with the aid of his crutches.

Vinny drove the horsebox up to the front gates and stopped. Davy, who had been previously crouching down to hide in the well of the passenger seat, got out, and after the vehicle had driven through, closed the gates and locked them with the new padlock, they had brought with them.

NO ESCAPE

Roger awoke to find himself with his legs tied and handcuffed round a horizontal metal bar. The horse stall he was in had a door with what appeared to be two-thirds solid made and the top section of metal bars. As he looked up, he could see a camera trained on him, obviously being fed to the dashboard and used to keep an eye of the horses when they were being transported.

An hour and a half later, he felt the vehicle stop and then heard the warning beep as it slowly reversed and came to a halt.

Roger felt the rays of light emerging him as the back doors opened and then the metal door to the stall was opened to reveal three men.

“We’re going to take you for a little ride. I hope you’re a good swimmer.”

Vinny opened the metal door of the other stall. Roger watched as the men took out its various contents. First was a wheelchair. Followed by a blanket, two plastic boxes slightly larger than shoe boxes, a large metal jerry can and two bags of cement.

Vinny got in and undid the handcuffs, and together with Davy they lifted Roger out of the stall and placed him in the wheelchair and then handcuffed him to one of the arms.

Roger could see they were in the car park of a marina.

“You’ll keep quiet if you know what’s good for you,” said Kevin.

Davy walked in front with Vinny pushing the wheelchair and Kevin hobbling along behind as they made their way along the walkway past a row of boats.

Suddenly they stopped by a boat called Voodoo Child. Roger knew enough about them to recognise it as a 44-foot long Sealine SC 44 cruiser with room for up to seven people.

Vinny and Davy grabbed the wheelchair, one on each side and carried it across onto the deck. Kevin hobbled down with the aid of his crutches.

Kevin went through to the cockpit and started the engine. Davy got off and untied the vessel from its moorings, and the boat moved as Kevin gently reversed it from the dock.

Once they were into clear water, Kevin changed the thrusters from reverse, and the boat moved gracefully forward.

Roger could feel the power of the twin Volvo diesel engines surging through the water. It was a lot quieter than Roger expected, but he thought that might be Kevin not driving at full speed.

They had been at sea for around forty-five minutes when Kevin cut the engines and came back to the open deck.

“We’ve got some cargo to collect and then we’ll be dumping some cargo – you!”

Kevin picked up a large phone. Roger noticed some writing on it. ‘Iridium GO 9560 Satellite’

Kevin dialled a number and after a few seconds, Roger heard him say, “How’s it going? Yeah, fine. All ready. Usual co-ordinates.”

Fifteen minutes later, what looked like a fishing trawler came into view and made its way over to the boat.

Kevin could see two men on board and once both vessels were close, a small boat made its way over from the trawler with one man on board and unloaded ten boxes onto Kevin’s boat. Kevin handed over a briefcase and the men shook hands and the boat made its way back to the trawler.

Kevin laughed. “That’s the cash you left when we did the exchange. You just paid for my latest shipment.”

Vinny and Davy took the boxes below deck.

“Thanks to you, I’m going to make a tidy little profit. But back to the business at hand.”

“Now, you bastard, where’s Tyson’s body. What have you done with it?”

“I’m sorry he died but it was an accident. He escaped and knocked me unconscious and then fell into the swimming pool, as I explained to you.

I've put his body in the kitchen freezer at the place where you picked me up. You'll find him there."

"Yeah. I better had find him there."

"Okay, boys. Hold our guest for me."

Vinny and Davy held Roger's arms.

Kevin stood directly in front of Roger.

"This is for Tyson," he said and directed a hard punch at Roger's face. As his fist made contact, so did the large ring on the middle finger of his right hand and scraped across, breaking the skin as it went. Blood poured from inside Roger's mouth.

Kevin swung again. And again. After several more blows, Roger lost consciousness.

Twenty minutes later, he was woken abruptly as he felt water being thrown in his face.

"Rise and shine, you fucker."

* * *

As he regained his senses, Roger could feel something around both his feet. He looked down as best he could with the swelling to his face. His sight was a little fuzzy.

He could see the two plastic boxes he'd noticed earlier were round his feet and had been filled with concrete.

"We decided to treat you to some new shoes. This fast-setting concrete mix only takes ten minutes to set. The wonders of modern science." Kevin laughed.

Vinny reached down and pulled off the plastic boxes as he lifted each of Roger's feet up one by one. Then Vinny and Davy carried him to the edge of the platform at the rear of the boat. Roger could see his back was three inches from the edge.

As he looked round, he assessed the situation. Thoughts rushing through his mind.

Things are not looking good. He's finally got me trapped. I'm on his boat with my feet wearing a pair of shoes made of concrete. Each block must weigh at least 40kg. My wrists are handcuffed in front of me, and this is real life, not a movie, so I don't have a paperclip handy to undo the locks

and save the day. Not that I'd know how to do it, even if I had one. We must be at least ten miles out to sea. So there's little chance of the cavalry charging over the hill at the last moment. His two goons have dragged me to within a couple of inches of the edge of the platform on the rear of the boat. My back is to the ocean. All it will take is one push, and I'll be in the water and going down fast. This is it. I never thought it would end like this.

THE SEND OFF

“Okay Vinny, I think it’s time for our guest to leave us. Let’s give him a good send off,” said Kevin.

As Vinny moved forward to carry out the command, Roger looked at Kevin.

“What, getting your minions to do your dirty work? Not man enough to do it yourself? Losing your bottle in your old age?”

“I ain’t scared. You’re not the first person I’ve killed, and you won’t be the last.”

Kevin pointed his finger at Roger. “The next two will be your father and ex-wife. I’ve got a special treat in store for them.”

Roger bellowed at Kevin. “I lied! It wasn’t an accident. I killed Tyson. Looked him right in the eyes when I finished him. Why don’t you come and look me right in the eyes and do it yourself.”

Kevin’s face grew red with anger. “You’ve been dead lucky to stay alive until now. But your luck just deserted you. Now all you’re going to be is fucking dead.”

Kevin held up his fists in rage as he hobbled over, leaving his crutches behind, and stood inches from Roger’s face.

Normally, Roger was two inches taller than Kevin, but in the concrete shoes the gap was more like five.

“This is for Tyson,” Kevin said and raised his arms to push Roger backwards into the water.

As Kevin reached out to push him, Roger swung his handcuffed arms as high in the air as he could and brought them down over Kevin’s head and gripped them around his waist and pulled Kevin into the water with him.

The move took Kevin completely by surprise. Normally he might have been able to get out of the way, but with the plaster cast slowing him down, he wasn't able to respond in time. Roger knew what was coming and had time to take a deep breath, but Kevin had been caught totally off guard.

The concrete shoes and Roger's tight grip on Kevin ensured they plummeted as Kevin desperately tried to break free, but Roger's grip was so tight he could barely move. He tried to headbutt Roger and kick out, but he was restricted by the plaster cast. Roger knew he had to hold on whatever happened. He was going to drown, and he was determined to take Kevin with him. If he didn't, his father and ex-wife would both be dead within a week.

As the two men descended below the waves into the freezing water, Kevin tried every trick he could think of to escape but whatever he did, Roger continued his vice-like grip.

Kevin's two helpers were shining their torches into the water but couldn't see anything.

"Are you going in after them?" asked Davy.

"Not fucking likely."

Just then they spotted a large boat nearing on them. It was closer than they realised as their concentration had been elsewhere. It was the coastguard, and they didn't have time to dump the six kilos of heroin and the cartons filled with 100,000 bags of monkey dust they had below deck.

Without Kevin to show them what to do, both men were lost. As members of the coastguard were on board, how would they explain the two plastic boxes with powdery remnants and the two sacks of cement?

It seemed likely they would be spending quite a few years behind bars, but perhaps it was a better choice than the watery grave that awaited their boss.

* * *

It had been over a minute and without the sharp intake of breath, Kevin's lungs were about to give out. With all of the blows and struggling he had received, Roger was also coming to the end of his breath but still managing to hold on as Kevin tried to breathe in but couldn't, and slowly his body went limp.

Roger was aware Kevin might be faking, hoping Roger would loosen his grip. He couldn't allow that to happen so would continue to fight for every second, for every inch they descended. He knew he only had seconds to live, but the deeper they fell, the less chance Kevin would have to make it back to the surface.

The water was getting darker on every side as the two figures descended. It must have been nearly two minutes and the darkness was encasing them. Roger knew it was too late for either of them. Kevin's body was now still and become a dead weight. They were past the point of no return. There was no chance either could possibly make it back to the surface alive.

Roger knew by the time the concrete shoes hit the bottom that he and Kevin would be dead.

He couldn't hold his breath much longer and was prepared for the inevitable. Just a handful of seconds left.

Then Roger heard a familiar girl's voice.

"I'm here, Daddy, waiting for you."

The End

A SMALL FAVOUR

I Hope You Enjoyed Reading My Third Novel

If so, may I ask you for a small favour

Would you please be kind enough to leave a review?

Independent books like mine are a huge challenge to market.

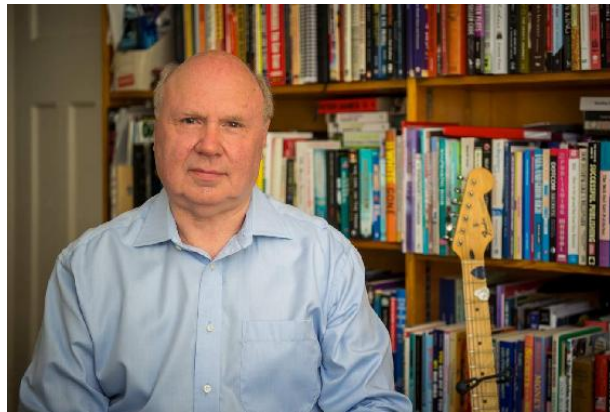
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Did you know? Less than 1 in 100 readers leave reviews so it really does help.

Thank you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

LEE WOOD



Before semi-retiring and turning to writing novels, Lee had a varied career. He spent more than 20 years working in the music industry. Everything from playing in bands as a teenager to running an indie record label and record shop during the punk rock era to starting a music collector's magazine and building it from zero to a circulation of 14,000 copies a month.

He's met virtually every top 'pop star' and achieved one of his lifetime ambitions when he became manager of The Troggs, one of his all-time favourite bands from his teens.

He wrote a best-selling book on the Sex Pistols in 1988, which was published by Omnibus Press and thanks to their well-oiled publicity machine sold a respectable 60,000 copies. It was also published in Japan – in Japanese!

He has lived in Cambridge for most of his life and looks on writing as a new adventure. He still finds time to play the guitar (Fender Stratocaster)

and is currently learning to play the drums with his wife. They found a drum teacher who has a studio with two kits and they are learning to play together side by side.

Mr Lucky, his first novel is available in eBook and paperback formats.

Lee suffers from ADD, (Attention Deficit Disorder) but has still managed to overcome it and complete his novel. He believes if he can do it, anyone can.

The third novel in this series 'Dead Lucky' is set to be published in November 2018.

You can stay in touch with Lee via his website where he offers readers access to short stories and exclusive previews.
<http://www.leewoodauthor.com>

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I would like to thank the following people for their help in making this book possible:

Morgen Bailey
Patricia McBride

MORE ADVENTURES IN TRENTBRIDGE

More adventures in Trentbridge

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Would you please be kind enough to leave a review?

Independent books like mine are a huge challenge to market.

I would really appreciate if you could take a couple of minutes to leave a review. Just a sentence or two stating why you liked the book is all it takes. It doesn't have to be fancy. Just think of it as leaving a tip after a meal you've enjoyed (instead of money it just takes a minute of your time), and I would truly appreciate it.

Less than 1% of readers leave reviews.

Thank you.

DEDICATIONS

This book is dedicated to the memory of Gerry Paine

And a special dedication to the memory of a wonderful man, Chris Savory
(Stoke-on-Trent).